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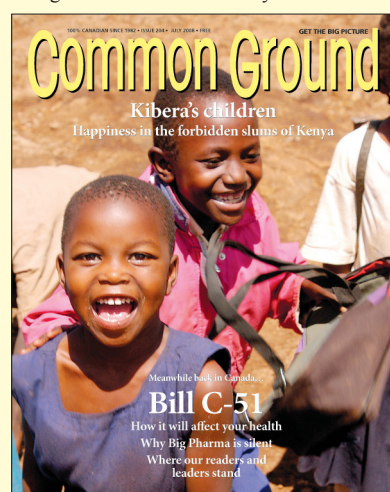
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The same wolf in different sheep's clothing

In this issue, Alan Cassels' *No Cure for What Ails Us* surprised me, as it included aspects of Bill C-51 that no one in the natural food industry had ever mentioned. I guess when you are a hammer everything looks like a nail. Alan's point about how C-51 would speed up new drugs coming to market, with pharmaceutical companies conducting their own follow-up studies on side effects (like the proverbial fox looking after the chicken coop), kicking sand in the face of the natural supplement folks, and, maybe even helping grease the wheels for direct-to-consumer drug advertising, just might be why we never heard a peep of complaint about Bill C-51 from the drug companies, while the NHPers were screaming bloody murder.

A number of people from Health Canada travelled to BC to explain Bill C-51 and *Common Ground* invited them to write 80 words about where they stood on Bill C-51. We wondered if they believed that amendments were the way to proceed, and if so, specifically which changes they would recommend. Unfortunately, they did not respond by press time, although two spokesmen did confide in me that they truly regretted Health Canada shutting down its own testing lab, considered one of the best bio-chemical labs in the world. They agreed that this didn't make sense, given that Health Canada claims to protect the health of Canadians. Trusting corporations to regulate themselves when their paramount fiscal duty is to increase share value can be counter to the well being of the peasants. Remember Elliot

Lake, the Tar Sands, Sarnia, asbestos, smoking... oops! Now the government is letting tobacco companies get away with advertising their anti-health products again.

Those of you manufacturers, producers, brokers and directors of CHFA who were unable to respond to our invitation, we know who you are. We welcome your emails and inspiration for inclusion in next month's edition. Croft Woodruff phoned in to say that our choice is to either spend an extra \$80 a month eating more nutritious foods and taking vitamins, or an extra \$1,200 a month on pharmaceuticals. It's pretty easy to figure out who supports each option. And yes, dear tax payers, Big Pharma appreciates your dollars. Your obedience helps their swarm of sales reps wooing your prescribing doctors. Over-medicated and under-nourished turns profits for the wolf.

The debate around Bill C-51 has been hot and furious and for good reasons. The *Common Ground* centre spread this month offers a forum on this debate and related health issues. We invite you to pull out and post the two-page spread at your stores or on your community bulletin boards. We received many more letters than we had space to print; please see www.commonground.ca for the full roster. We welcome your emails for next month's debate, conversation and inspiration at editor@commonground.ca

There is much to like in this edition of *Common Ground*, from techno moon trips to mycelial networks to the ecology of the soul. So enjoy your summer in paradise. We are all in it together. Best wishes for a lovely July.



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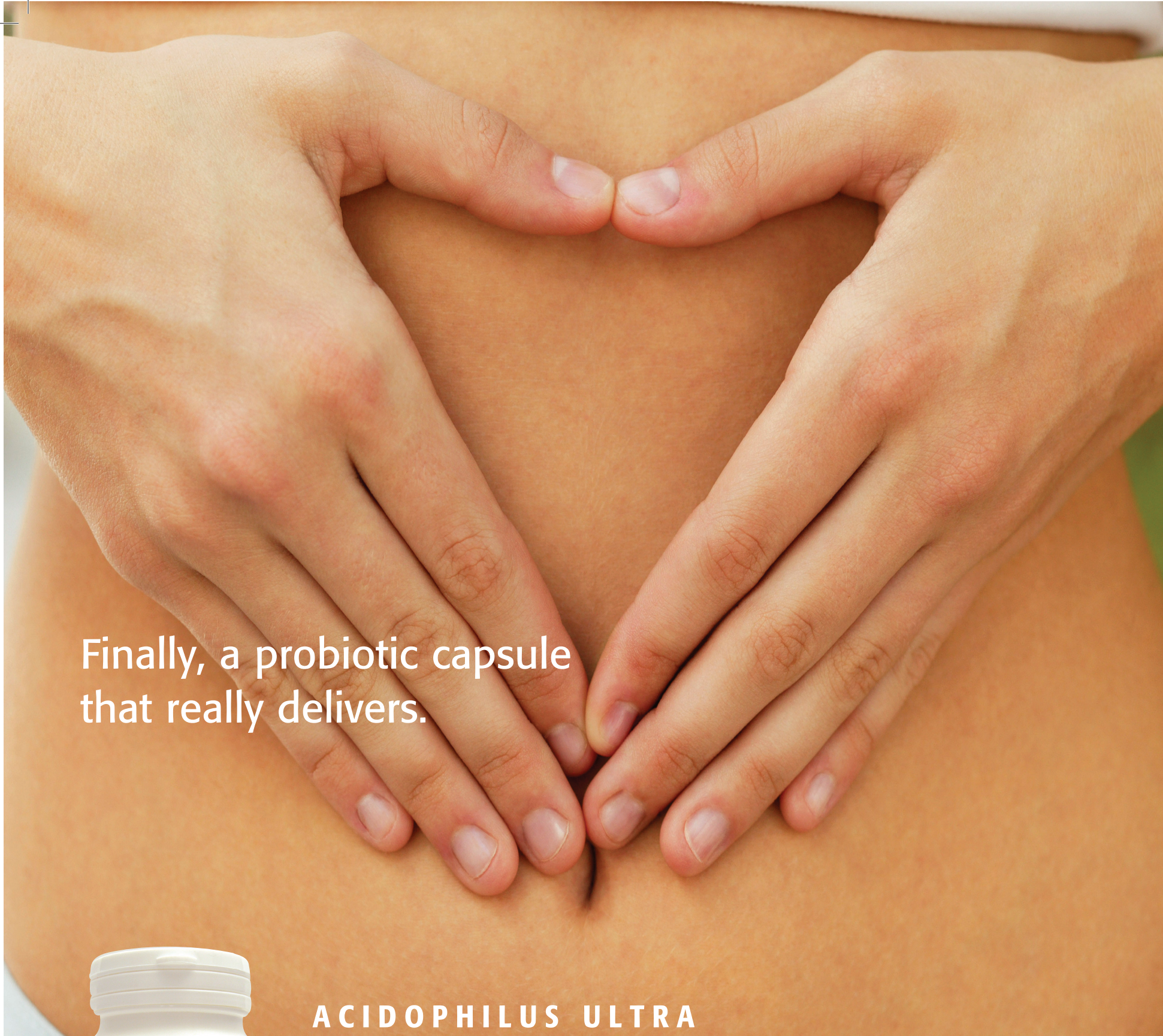
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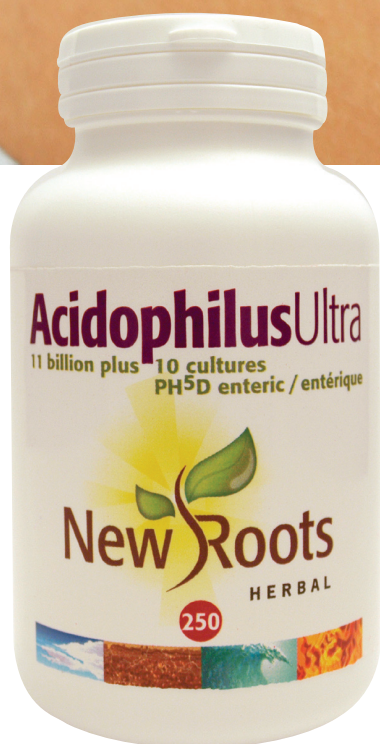
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Summer in paradise

NUTRISPEAK Vesanto Melina MS, RD

We can have the best holiday ever right here in our exquisite corner of heaven. I am so grateful for all the love, care and foresight that continue to go into local initiatives, such as preserving our local parks, extending the seawall and maintaining our lovely surroundings. Here are some favourite ways to spend a few hours on these glorious summer days and also some healthful tips for keeping fit and feasting.

The Vancouver seawall can now take you all the way from Kitsilano Beach to Stanley Park. Cycle along the new stretch that begins at the south end of the Cambie Bridge and extends to Science World. Continue along the north side of False Creek to Stanley Park; pass through the

lengths, you've swum a mile.

Stroll along 4th Avenue west of Burrard Street; you'll discover a multitude of fascinating stores and restaurants, including Annapurna, Sejuiced and the Naam.

In Vancouver, we can easily be international travellers. We can visit India at 49th and Main, immerse ourselves in Chinatown and then head up Lonsdale to North Vancouver's Middle Eastern restaurants. For a mix of ethnic experiences, we can wander along Commercial Drive, stopping at Eternal Abundance for juice or a raw lasagne.

Pack a picnic and rent a kayak from Tayaka Tours in Cates Park or from Deep Cove. Paddle over to Belcarra Park's beach.

In Vancouver, we can be international travellers. We can visit India at 49th and Main, immerse ourselves in Chinatown, then head up Lonsdale to North Vancouver's Middle Eastern restaurants.

tunnel and circle Stanley Park along the seawall in a counter-clockwise direction.

When you reach the concession at Third Beach, you might stop for an excellent veggie burger on a whole-wheat bun. The seawall accommodates baby buggies, wheelchairs, skaters, pedestrians and more; just take care to stay on the appropriate path. For cycling maps and other routes, visit <http://vancouver.ca/engsvcs/transport/cycling/routes.htm>

Able cyclists head for Wendell's in Fort Langley to enjoy berry crumble and other tasty items. Two blocks away, walk around the Fort; exhibits include First Nations information and artifacts. In addition to the Adobe Grill, there are plenty of fun eateries to the east and south.

While visiting Gastown or the Vancouver Public Library, you might also want to sample one of Vancouver's best massages at Handy Health Centre at 422 Richards Street near Hastings. At the same address, stop for a juice or raw entree at Gorilla Food.

Treat youngsters or out of town visitors to a mini-voyage on one of the small ferries that run between the Maritime Museum, the Aquatic Centre, Science World and Granville Island. They'll love the adventure. At Granville Island, watch musicians and entertainers and find foods for every taste. Walk under the Burrard Bridge to the Planetarium where you can enjoy kite flyers and beaches. At Kitsilano Pool, if you do 12

Heading east along Highway 1, turn off at exit 104 (Yellow Market) to swim in Cultus Lake. Enroute, stop at Yarrow's deli, a delightful little business run by the new Yarrow Ecovillage.

At Harrison Hot Springs, walk along the lake or beach. Soak in the internationally famous mineral waters; the public pool can have the feeling of a peaceful, meditative Asian bathhouse. Then perhaps dine and dance at the Hotel's Copper Room. (The menu includes a delicious, vegan Portobello entree.)

Just past Hope, wander through abandoned train tunnels on the Kettle Valley Rail Trail. In Hope, stop at the Blue Moose coffee house for salads, wraps and beverages.

Victoria is a delightful place to cycle. Take a lunch or stop by the Green Cuisine vegetarian restaurant in the square at 560 Johnson Street and have them pack you one. Then head along the Galloping Goose trail.

If you take a trip to any of the Gulf Islands, the ferry transports you to island time. You'll happily idle the day away at Saltspring's Morningside Organic Bakery and Café or simply enjoy the beauty of Galiano Island's Serenity by the Sea.

Dietitian and author Vesanto Melina was born in Vancouver, and feels truly blessed for what we have. For personal nutrition consultations, call 604-882-6782 or email vesanto@nutrispeak.com www.nutrispeak.com

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DRUG BUST

Alan Cassels

Bill C-51 – no cure for what ails us

If you've visited a health food or vitamin store in Canada recently, you're no doubt aware that the federal government wants to change the way it monitors and regulates the health products you use.

There are dozens of bills before parliament right now, but none are generating as much ink or email as the proposed Bill C-51. In attacks led by the folks in the natural health products industry, the Bill's main point of contention is the government's wish to lump natural products and pharmaceutical drugs together under one regulatory umbrella. If Canadians are going to keep putting things into their mouths, those things do require some level of government oversight, regardless of whether the product was manufactured in a lab or drawn from a plant.

The volume and virulence of the attacks on Health Minister Tony Clement have been intense, and in mid-June, he seemed to relent. He admitted to the *Vancouver Sun* that maybe "It was a mistake not to create a separate category under the law." When you consider that the vast majority of natural health products pose infinitesimally smaller risks than most pharmaceuticals, and have been used safely and effectively for generations with nary any government oversight, this distinction is a most helpful advance.

Yet even with some amendments, this bill could spell big trouble, but not because the Mounties will soon be kicking in your door to see what's in your

medicine cabinet, but because Bill C-51 will accelerate Canadians' access to new prescription pharmaceutical products. Maybe the federal government is getting into the Olympic groove, believing that we need to enshrine the three-word Olympic motto – "Swifter, Higher, Stronger" – and extend it to drug regulation. However, those who clamour for faster access to new drugs ignore the axiom "Speed Kills," clearly displaying an astonishingly short attention span in this post-Vioxx world.

The irony, of course, is that while you may want faster access to drugs, you certainly do not expect immediate access to drugs with safety problems. Research on this issue is quite telling. One study, which looked at the speed of approval and the safety of drugs in the UK versus the US over a 20-year period, found that relatively longer approval times in the US created more stringent reviews and fewer post-market safety withdrawals. Which is to say, if the regulator takes its time and gets it right, it won't have to remove the drug (and bury the bodies) when things go sideways. Another study found that for every month chopped off the approval process by the reviewers, adverse drug reactions resulting in deaths increased by two percent. Here's my reading of the data – "Speed Kills."

In May, we were reminded just how dangerous widespread access to prescription drugs is. A study out of Florida revealed that the rate of deaths caused

by prescription drugs was three times the rate of deaths caused by all illicit drugs combined. If anything, slower and more careful attention to how drugs are approved, prescribed, used and monitored may be what the doctor ordered, but will you find these kinds of safety measures in Bill C-51? Not at all. Instead, there's a promise of "Progressive Licensing" which is a sure hit if you're a drug manufacturer, but potentially bad news for the rest of us.

Speaking of the drug companies, here's a skill testing question for my readers: What do our friends in Rx&D, the group of brand name drug makers in

is the jewel in the crown of pharma marketing – a potentially \$500 million per year ad market in Canada that can transform a ho-hum or even dangerous drug into a blockbuster, through the power of persuasive ads. Will full-blown, American-style DTCA emerge from bill C-51? It's too early to tell, but if it does, it will be as bad for your health as any product could conceivably be.

If you're a brand name drug manufacturer, you'll be happy to see the government speed up the approval of new drugs. One of the main problems with speeding up the drug approval process is that, since the drug companies pay a fee

.....
Even with some amendments, this bill could spell big trouble, but not because the Mounties will soon be kicking in your door to see what's in your medicine cabinet, but because Bill C-51 will accelerate Canadians' access to new prescription pharmaceutical products.

Canada, think of Bill C-51? You may be excused for not knowing the answer, as the industry's key lobbyist seems eerily silent on the issue. Knowing that this is an industry that can lash out with the fury of a mother grizzly whenever its markets are threatened, how can we explain its tight lips around the biggest change to Canadian drug regulations in half a century? I can't answer this for sure, but let me hazard a guess: It's because they like it. They like it a lot.

Why?

For starters, and in the spirit of a little *schadenfreude*, what's not to like about a proposed law that makes your 98-pound weakling competitor (the "natural products" industry) apoplectic with rage? Let's face it; any law that kicks sand in the face of a competitor by blinding him with bureaucratic red tape is a pretty sweet deal on its own.

But beyond this, my reading of the new proposed law is that it'll do three things that the brand name companies love: increase the speed with which drugs arrive on the market, keep any pesky after-market drug testing in the hands of the companies themselves, and best of all, allow the pharmaceutical industry to "talk to its constituencies."

This last bit will also make Canada's media industry awfully happy, as it pertains to changes to the laws around advertising drugs directly to consumers. DTCA (Direct to Consumer Advertising)

to have their drugs approved, the government can be penalized financially for not approving products fast enough.

This kind of pressure to go faster, instead of safer, is akin to having someone standing over your surgeon's shoulder yelling at him to "hurry up, hurry up" as he operates on your heart. Wouldn't you rather him take his time and get things right? Why would we expect anything different when we are judging the safety and effectiveness of a drug that will be used by millions of people?

Even though Tony Clement stated in the *Globe and Mail*, "There are no changes that lower the safety standards or speed up drug approvals," you would hear nothing but howls of protest from the drug industry if the new bill didn't implicitly promise speedier drug approvals. If Clement is wrong, and what actually emerges from Bill C-51 are tougher safety standards – that is, slower, more careful monitoring of new drugs throughout their life cycle – it will be the drug companies you hear screaming blue murder, not the natural health folks.

If you have a drug company and you want to sell your drug in Canada, there is basically an "all or none" situation: the drug either gets a licence to be sold or it doesn't. Bill C-51 enshrines the concept of "Progressive Licensing," which is an attempt to get drugs on the market even faster, with the promise that the drug will be followed and monitored

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throughout its life cycle. If this idea on its own doesn't make you feel more like a Guinea pig than you did before, then consider this fact: the "post-marketing" studies of those newly licensed drugs will likely be financed, organized and analyzed by the companies themselves.

Sweet.

That's right; the language of C-51 suggests that the manufacturer will be responsible for paying for, running and analyzing postmarketing studies. This will hardly provide the answers we need because there's a pretty conclusive link between those who fund a study and the conclusions they find. Conveniently, the drug companies have been found keeping the stuff they don't want airing in the bottom of a file drawer.

The biggest problem with Bill C-51 may have to do with both what we know and what we won't know about new drugs. The drug companies like to talk a lot about "transparency," something they demand from public organizations, but strenuously avoid in their own behaviour. Often, key information about a drug held by Health Canada in the course of approving it is withheld from any public scrutiny, all in the name of "business confidentiality."

In Canada, we can't even be told if our regulator is in the process of reviewing a drug's application. Nor can we find out the full results of the clinical trials the ministry examined, in order to grant a licence

to the company, even though Health Canada can release summaries of its decisions. Further, we can't learn what Health Canada's own reviewers stated about the drug trials they saw or any of the reasons a drug may have been rejected.

Transparency is vitally important for information to be independently scrutinized, and for the full picture of a new drug to be disclosed to health care professionals and the public. Yet there is no sense whatsoever that Bill C-51 is going to deliver on the transparency front.

In a nutshell, Bill C-51 possesses huge potential to cause harm to anyone who takes prescription drugs. It could expose Canadians to more ads about drugs; it could significantly speed up the drug approval process; it could require that drug companies fund and then carry out biased, post-market studies, while refusing to allow access to the efficacy and safety data that Canadians need to ensure that taking prescription drugs is a healthy and safe activity.

"Swifter, Higher, Stronger." That's what we expect the new regulations to be. Instead, Health Canada could end up giving further Olympian powers to the manufacturers and sellers of prescription drugs in Canada.

Alan Cassels is a pharmaceutical policy researcher and a frequent commentator on prescription drug issues. www.mediadoctor.ca alan@mediadoctor.ca

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by Sam Graci

When you hear the word health, what comes to mind? Unless you are ill or overweight, it's likely that you consider yourself to be healthy.

If I were to ask you if you'd like to achieve incredible energy, mental clarity, improved digestion, easier weight loss and reduced risk for serious disease, you'd wonder what the secret is. The answer is an alkaline pH level.

Without getting too scientific, your body's pH (potential of hydrogen) represents the balance of positively charged (acid-forming) ions to negatively charged (alkalinizing) ions. For optimum health, studies show that the ideal blood chemistry is slightly alkaline. Unfortunately, most people are overly acidic due to poor diet. When the body is overly acidic, it becomes an opportune environment for disease and chronic illness, not to mention the negative impact it has on your energy levels, metabolism and bone health.

The good news is that you can achieve a more alkaline pH beginning with the foods you put on your plate. That's because after food is consumed, digested and absorbed, it leaves an ash residue in the body. Foods that produce an alkaline ash are called "alkaline forming foods," whereas those that produce acid ash are called "acid-forming foods." While the body requires both types of foods, studies indicate that the ideal diet is 75 percent alkalinizing and 25 percent acidifying, by volume.

An acidic body is a body at risk

What happens when your body is too acidic? Researchers believe that, due to the following effects, your health becomes impaired:

- Free radical oxidation occurs, impairing antioxidant activity.
- Vitamins and minerals are not properly absorbed.
- Calcium is leached from the bone, increasing the risk of osteoporosis.
- Friendly bacteria in the small intestine dies.
- The immune system becomes weak/impaired.
- Physical and mental energy is depleted, affecting stamina and mood.

Acid-forming foods

The minerals sulphur, phosphorus and iron form acid ions inside the body.

These minerals are primarily found in proteins, such as fish, poultry, meat, eggs, grains, legumes and most nuts and seeds. Other highly acidic food sources that are full of phosphoric and carbonic acids include cola soft drinks, coffee and alcohol.

It's no wonder that North Americans experience the highest incidents of heart disease, obesity and osteoporosis, to name only a few health conditions. We're the largest consumers of animal proteins, processed foods, grains and dairy, and we're overly acidic!

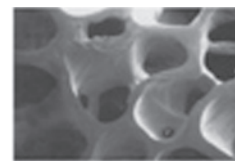


The alkaline diet

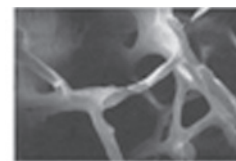
Fresh fruits and vegetables are the most alkalinizing foods available. Spinach, broccoli, apples, cherries, spices, green food drinks and a variety of herbs represent only a few of the best sources to include in your daily diet.

So does this mean you must eliminate all acid-forming foods to achieve optimum health? Not necessarily. Instead, buffer their acid overload by including alkaline-forming foods in combination. For example, combine lean, white chicken with vegetables such as asparagus and kale.

If you can't consume the recommended five to 10 servings of fresh fruits and vegetables daily, try adding a green food supplement rich in phytonutrients. Specifically, look for one that's research-proven and more alkalinizing than any other food, including spinach and raisins.



Natural healthy bone with strong honeycombs.



Osteoporotic bone that is thinner, weaker, and more prone to fracture.

Popeye was right

According to a recent study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* by Agricultural Research Service (ARS)-funded scientists, a diet rich in alkalinizing plant foods was shown to help preserve muscle mass in older men and women.

Despite the natural aging process and the increase of acidosis, which causes muscle loss, the older subjects in this study averaged 3.6 more pounds of lean muscle versus subjects who did not consume an alkaline-rich diet. Scientists attribute these results to the alkalinizing effect of plant foods rich in potassium, among other important nutrients.

Another cause of acidity in the body is intense exercise. So if you're the type to hit the gym hard and often, you'll want to include a green food drink directly following bouts of strenuous exercise. Not only will this help neutralize the acid overload, it will also promote stronger, healthier bones without losing lean muscle mass as you age.

To determine your pH level, you can purchase a pH test at your local health food store. Ideally, you want to achieve a neutral score of 6.8 to 7.1. Anything below 7 is acidic. Using your saliva or urine, the test is relatively easy and can provide an accurate measurement.

In closing, as a nutritional researcher who's worked with some of the world's best medical experts, doctors, pharmacists and scientists at some of the most prestigious institutions, I can tell you that the path to phenomenal health starts with you. By changing your diet to one that is more alkaline, I can guarantee your body will thank you with increased health and vitality.

For further information about the acid-alkaline health connection, including a complete list of recommended foods, visit www.genuinehealth.com and search "pH."

Sam Graci is a nutritional researcher and author of The Bone Building Solution.



Finding happiness in the slums of Kibera

by Maia Green

INSPIRATION

Children are amazing creatures. Mini versions of you and I, they have all the same bits and brains, but they're not yet jaded in the same way. They don't harbour the same cynicism towards the world. Rather, they possess an amazing love for life, a contagious positiveness that leads to hope and creativity, the very qualities we need in order to move towards creating a better world.

A few years ago, I journeyed to Kenya to take part in the UN Climate Change negotiations, and, while there, my eyes were opened to much more than environmental issues. My experience with the climate negotiations was certainly packed with learning, but the time I spent at a school in the depths of Kibera, Nairobi's largest slum, taught me much more and impacted me in a way that changed me forever.

While the word Kibera means forest, I am quite certain I didn't see a single tree throughout any of my visits there. Kibera is now home to a million people, who live without clean water or adequate sanitation, basic needs we take for granted. It is a massive area with a dense population and extreme poverty. Death caused by disease and conflict is commonplace and one fifth of the Kenyans living with HIV live in Kibera. Kibera is not a tourist destination and not somewhere that you can visit without a local guide. I was nervous about going there and envisioned a dark and scary place.

My experience began with a winding path through little passage ways and shortcuts over rickety metal bridges. We travelled past street vendors, cell phone shops, medical clinics and veggie stands (all miniature in stature), until we finally came to the little door in a metal fence that looked in at the grounds of Kisumu Dogo Primary School.

The office was tiny, probably about the size of one of our bathrooms here. I felt like I had been thrown back in time. Spread around the room were little wooden desks and piles of yellowed paper that looked as if they belonged in a museum, and posters of the alphabet peeled from the wall. There was no electricity, but one of the corrugated plastic pieces making up the roof was somewhat transparent and provided light.

There were 450 kids at the school, and one was attached to my lap within minutes. Her name was Linda. She was two-years-old, snotty nosed, wide-eyed and adorable. She didn't speak; she just stared.

I visited the school a few times and each time I was more awestruck. I had thought that going deep into one of the largest slums of Kenya would be depressing. I thought it would make me want to cry. I thought I would be overwhelmed by how unfair the world is, and how hard some people's lives are. I thought that while it would be really hard, it was something I should do. Oh, I was so wrong.

My visits to the school gave me some of the most beautiful, inspiring and uplifting moments, not only of my trip, but of my life. The kids read me poems and sang me beautiful songs. They smiled from ear to ear and ran around the schoolyard giggling and playing. They shrieked and screamed over the few tennis balls and skipping ropes I had brought from Canada and immediately began playing intricate games with them.

And yes, I almost cried; I was on the verge of tears the entire time. But not because I felt sorry for them. Not because I felt guilty and terrible. The tears were because of the beauty of it all. Because of how much the teachers loved

the children. Because of how amazing the children were. Because of how happily they played with nothing to play with. Because of how excited they were that someone from Canada had come to see them. I was on the verge of tears because of how incredible it all was and because I was going to be genuinely sad to leave. I felt so welcomed and so comfortable in this amazing place, deep in the forbidden slum of Kibera.

I was not crying because the swing was broken in half and hanging six feet in the air, wrapped around the pole it was supposed to hang from. And I was not crying because of the pile of garbage near the little, wooden outhouses that some of the kids were playing soccer on. Nor was it because three classes



had to share one classroom because there was no space.

These things were a reality, but they didn't make me feel sorry for the kids.

How could I feel sorry for people that were so genuinely happy? They wouldn't have wanted that anyway. They were so appreciative of what was given to them and so creative with what they had, that instead of pity, what I felt was empathetic gratitude.

They had given me so much and I wanted to give something back to these inspiring and wonderful people. I decided to start a pen pal program between them and the school I was working at in Victoria. I brought home bags of their handiwork and jewellery, and have been selling it on their behalf for the past few years. I send them 100 percent of the money generated from the sale of their work and it is the most incredible feeling in the world because I know exactly whose hands it is going into and how it is being used. I keep in touch with the headmaster through email and his words are so kind that I can't help but have a huge smile every time I hear from him. My dream is to make my way back there someday to see all of my old friends and to build them a classroom... and perhaps a swing.

But that is in the present. During my time with the kids at the Kisumu Dogo School in the depths of Kibera, those perfect small children didn't need toys and fancy jungle gyms. They had each other, and for the moment, they had me. And they just wanted to play.

Maia Green was born in Victoria, BC, but has spent much of her life living and travelling overseas. She is a writer, photographer, educator and the founder and director of Friends Unit-ing for Nature (FUN).

www.funccamps.ca maia@funccamps.ca (See article on page 31.)

Get involved

Positively AFRICA (www.positivelyafrica.org) is a small non-profit with a mission to enable people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa to live with hope and dignity. Maia has connected her friends in Kibera to this organization. You may donate directly to Positively AFRICA, or get involved on a personal level.

The jewellery mentioned in the article is available directly through Maia or Positively AFRICA. In Vancouver, you can find it at Kali Trading Co and HT Naturals, both located in the Commercial Drive area.

The Kibera Community Youth Program initially connected Maia with the Kisumu Dogo School. They do amazing work, from environmental restoration to health programs. They are now actively working with Positively AFRICA on a nutrition and health project. Donations can be made directly to this group at www.kcyp.kabissa.org/

Also check out <http://oaprojects.org/oas-project-rwanda/> for information about a group of youth who are travelling to Rwanda to develop local sport infrastructure and support improved access to schooling and healthcare for Rwandan children.

British author

Benjamin Creme talks about

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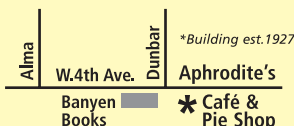
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A different reality

THE POWER OF NOW Eckhart Tolle

SPIRITUALITY

I don't agree that the body needs to die. I am convinced that we can achieve physical immortality. We believe in death and that's why the body dies.

The body does not die because you believe in death. The body exists, or seems to, because you believe in death. Body and death are part of the same illusion, created by the egoic mode of consciousness, which has no awareness of the Source of life and sees itself as separate and constantly under threat. So it creates the illusion that you are a body – a dense, physical vehicle that is constantly under threat.

To perceive yourself as a vulnerable body that was born and a little later dies

If you believe, on a deep level, in separation and the struggle for survival, then you see that belief reflected all around you and your perceptions are governed by fear.

Nothing is what it seems to be. The world that you create and see through the egoic mind may seem a very imperfect place, even a vale of tears. But whatever you perceive is only a kind of symbol, like an image in a dream. It is how your consciousness interprets and interacts with the molecular energy dance of the universe. This energy is the raw material of so-called physical reality. You see it

Every moment, your consciousness creates the world that you inhabit. One of the greatest insights of modern physics is that of the unity between the observer and the observed.

– that's the illusion. Body and death: one illusion. You cannot have one without the other. You want to keep one side of the illusion and get rid of the other, but that is impossible. Either you keep all of it or you relinquish all of it.

However, you cannot escape from the body, nor do you have to. The body is an incredible misperception of your true nature. But your true nature is concealed somewhere within that illusion, not outside it, so the body is still the only point of access to it.

If you saw an angel but mistook it for a stone statue, all you would have to do is adjust your vision and look more closely at the "stone statue," not start looking somewhere else. You would then find there never was a stone statue.

If belief in death creates the body, why does an animal have a body? An animal doesn't have an ego and it doesn't believe in death. But it still dies, or seems to.

Remember that your perception of the world is a reflection of your state of consciousness. You are not separate from it and there is no objective world out there. Every moment, your consciousness creates the world that you inhabit. One of the greatest insights of modern physics is that of the unity between the observer and the observed: the person conducting the experiment – the observing consciousness – cannot be separated from the observed phenomena and a different way of looking causes the observed phenomena to behave differently.

in terms of bodies and birth and death, or as a struggle for survival. An infinite number of completely different interpretations, completely different worlds, is possible and, in fact, exists, all depending on the perceiving consciousness.

Every being is a focal point of consciousness and every such focal point creates its own world, although all those worlds are interconnected. There is a human world, an ant world, a dolphin world and so on. There are countless beings whose consciousness frequency is so different from yours that you are probably unaware of their existence, as they are of yours.

Our collective human world is largely created through the level of consciousness we call mind. Even within the collective human world there are vast differences – many different "sub-worlds" – depending on the perceivers or creators of their respective worlds. Since all worlds are interconnected, when collective human consciousness becomes transformed, nature and the animal kingdom will reflect that transformation. Hence the statement in the *Bible* that, in the coming age, "The lion shall lie down with the lamb." This points to the possibility of a completely different order of reality.

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The illusion of control

UNIVERSE WITHIN Gwen Randall-Young

And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. – Max Ehrmann

Sometimes, things happen in life and we become frustrated because life isn't going the way we want it to. At other times, more serious life events may occur and we wonder, "Why me?" At times like that, we may lose faith, become discouraged and decide it is a cruel world after all.

This, of course, is the perspective of ego. Ego has it all figured out. It knows the way it wants things to be and how they should be. Ego is happy if things go according to its plan, for then there is some sense of being in control. Ego is not interested in any larger plan or an unfolding or co-created destiny. Nope; it's ego's way or there's gonna be trouble!

The problem with this plan is that the world and people are unpredictable. There is so much over which we have little, if any, control. Further, ego's frustration may come from the fact that

player" to have any turns, unless they are favourable to ego. Ego resists what is, sees little beyond itself and sure enough, life is a struggle.

There is a better alternative. When we identify more with our souls, we transcend the dramas of ego. Yes, the same things may happen, but we respond differently. Soul knows the wisdom of surrender. It knows there is no point in resisting what is and understands that what is may be exactly what is supposed to be. Our observer soul may proceed with almost wide-eyed wonder, ready to embrace the next experience.

How can we embrace difficult experiences? When we have embraced life itself and chosen to be fully conscious, we know that everything that happens is a part of life. We accept that there will be joy/sorrow, pain/pleasure, happiness/disappointment and birth/death. We cannot just pick out the parts we want and leave the rest.

Struggle comes not so much from what happens to us, but rather from our

.....
Soul knows the wisdom of surrender. It knows there is no point in resisting what is and understands that what is may be exactly what is supposed to be.
.....

while it thinks it is running the show, there is an aeons-old plan created by soul, in concert with other souls that is running on autopilot. In terms of our soul's journey, this plan serves our highest good, but ego has a hard time with that.

How could a setback in life be in one's highest good? At the time of crisis, ego recoils in pain and resistance. It may be years before it sees that had it not been for the divorce or lay-off at work, it would never have been in the good place it is now.

Life crises and changes may be the catalysts that move us forward in our growth and evolution. We can think of them like the contractions of labour, pushing us out to a broader level of awareness and understanding. If we do not see this movement, then we simply experience the pain and see no purpose to it.

Some may spend an entire lifetime reacting to life, instead of integrating the experiences, both joyful and painful. Life is an interactive experience, but ego does not want the "other

reaction to it. It makes little sense to get into a power struggle with the universe. When we do, we are like two-year-olds who keep trying to get into that locked closet because they want what is in there. We can scream and yell, have a tantrum, even kick the door, but it will not open because that is not where we are supposed to be.

When we choose surrender and acceptance, we can become much more relaxed and peaceful. We do not need to maintain constant vigilance or try to control everything. Instead, we can stay in the present moment enjoying it fully. We know difficult times may come and we will deal with them when they do.

For now, we can just be.

Listen to Gwen Randall-Young on Drishti Point, Vancouver's yoga radio talk show, on Monday August 11 from 5-6pm on CFRO 102.7FM. Visit www.drishtipoint.ca for more info. For information about her books and "Deep Powerful Change" personal growth/hypnosis CD, visit www.gwen.ca.

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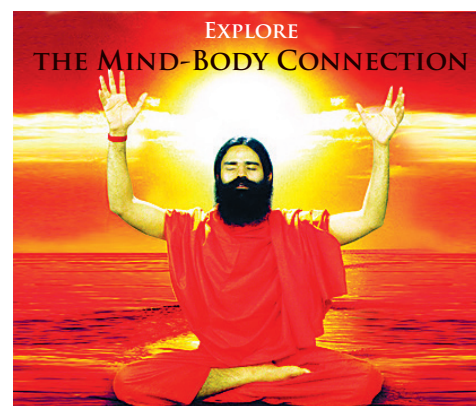
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"GOOD HEALTH IS HUMANITY'S BIRTHRIGHT" – SWAMI RAMDEV



Common Ground

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From moon trips to mycelial networks

Billion year-old biotech trumps computer age blunders

by Geoff Olson

I was at a summer arts camp on Lake Ontario when I got the good news the night of July 20, 1969. Word had travelled from the counsellors to the kids that Apollo 11 had reached the moon. NASA had shepherded three astronauts through millions of miles in space, allowing Neil Armstrong to make his "...one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

I remember lying on my bunk bed that night, looking through a window at the night sky, marvelling that there were people on the lunar surface. For a kid hooked on comic books about superheroes and space creatures, it was a Marvel fantasy come true. As I drifted off to sleep, it seemed there were no limits to what adults could do.

And it seemed that, at the time, a lot of adults thought the same thing. According to writer Loren Eiseley, within a week of NASA's triumph, a US senator crowed, "We are masters of the universe. We can go anywhere we choose." In the jubilee year of American technological triumph, it seemed more a statement of fact than outright hubris. But scientists, if not senators, knew that travelling to the moon was like visiting a next-door neighbour, astronomically speaking. Mars would be a cross-country road trip and the closest star would be a slow boat to China – that is, if the boat were a shoebox and the pilot a mouse.

Ah, the masters of the universe. Nearly two decades after Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin left their footprints in the Sea of Tranquility, the cartoon series *Masters of the Universe* debuted, based on a line of toys bearing the same name. Writer Tom Wolfe subsequently reworked the expression to describe Wall Street's best and brightest in his 1988 novel *Bonfire of the Vanities*. The cartoons and toys are distant memories now, but "masters of the universe" lives on, as jokey shorthand for briefcase-carrying barbarians in the financial market, who wreak havoc on everything from pension funds to national economies at the touch of a keypad. Computers, the most significant spawn of the space age, allow us to do things that much faster than ever before, MOTU's included.

As a kid, I was caught up in the frenzy of technological optimism of the Apollo missions. My faith in American know-how, can-do and tally-ho got mixed up in my young head with a lot of other pop culture baggage, including Marvel's Manhattan-based superheroes. Vietnam,

Watergate and other manned missions to nowhere finished off that faith. The stretching superpower of the Fantastic Four's scientist leader, Reed Richards, was nothing compared to the rubbery congressional testimony of Iran-Contra conspirator Oliver North and other Reagan administration super villains.

There's no denying the incredible triumph of the Apollo missions. But with the perspective of time, it's ironic that even while we were proudly sending our insect-like lunar modules to the moon, we remained ignorant of tens of thousands of species on our own planet – the real alien life close by. Creatures like sea floor tubeworms and sulfur-metabolizing shrimp were still years away from being discovered, as was Oregon's "humongous fungus."

I learned of the latter just recently over lunch with a friend who described the discovery, in 2000, of a gigantic fungus in Eastern Oregon, growing three feet underground and covering 2,200 acres, or 1,600 football fields. "They knew it was the same organism because they examined the DNA at both ends. Can you imagine being a creature seven miles in size?" my friend asked.

Sure, I said, responding with a lame remark about the late Italian tenor, Luciano Pavarotti.

As I later discovered, *Armillaria ostoyae* is commonly known as a Honey mushroom and sometimes called Shoe-string Rot. The threadlike mycelium attacks the sapwood and is capable of travelling great distances under the bark or between trees in the form of black rhizomorphs, or "shoestrings." The 2,200-acre organism in Malheur National Forest in the Blue Mountains of Eastern Oregon isn't just the largest fungal colony in the world. As far as we know, it's the biggest organism on the planet. This whopper has a total mass estimated as much as 605 tons, although its mycelial net is only one-cell thick. It's estimated to be 2,400 years old, though it could be up to three times that age. Its nearest competitor in size is another *Armillaria ostoyae* found infecting Ponderosa pine in eastern Washington State in 1992. It covered 1,500 acres.

The humongous fungus of the Pacific Northwest is so odd, you might even call it a kind of ultra terrestrial life. Who needs to go into space to look for alien beings?

Of course, when we think of fungi at all, it's usually with a mix of aversion and revulsion. Mushrooms, mold, yeast

and mildew are all forms of fungi. The occasional encounter with the brightly coloured mystery at the back of the fridge is quite enough for most of us. We would prefer that fungi didn't exist at all, Portobello mushrooms notwithstanding.

The truth is fungi are much more interesting than we give them credit for. The fruiting bodies of common forest-floor fungi, or mushroom caps, are the delivery system for the spores. When the mushroom dies, it sporulates. A mycelial network, the vegetative part of the fungus, appears under the ground. Mycelium infuses all landscapes, holding soil together with their cobwebbed network of filaments, allowing microbial communities to grow in the interstices.

In a single cubic inch of soil there can be eight miles of mycelium. Take a walk through the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest and some of the places where your foot falls may cover hundreds of miles of mycelia. They don't just literally keep things together underground. They transfer nutrients from alder and birch trees to cedars, hemlocks and Douglas firs, mediating a kind of soil-based socialism among coniferous trees.

"The world is a vast, living, interconnected being," my friend pronounced during lunch, using the humongous fungus as an example. British chemist James Lovelock's theory, that planet Earth is self-regulating system, probably isn't the half of it. What new discovery about nature is just around the corner, highlighting how limited our knowledge has been – and likely always will be?

Wherever we travel in the universe, hightailing it away from Mother Earth, we can be sure our native ignorance will follow, along with Murphy's law.

From "alien species" that decimate local sea life when they are dumped from ships' ballasts, to the Frankenstein-like problems of cloning and recombinant technologies, to the radioactive legacy of depleted uranium, it seems we're never quite smart enough to foresee the long-term side effects of our grand schemes and brilliant inventions. Ronald Wright, author of the *A Short History of Progress*, calls it "the revenge of the tools."

All things considered, I think I have a bit more faith in the humongous fungus' age-old biotech.

In 2005, President Bush called to land humans on the moon by 2020. NASA hopes to spend \$100 billion on the "Constellation program," putting

four astronauts on the lunar surface within 12 years, as a stepping stone to a manned mission to Mars. A new lunar orbiter set to launch in late 2008 will study the moon for a planned human-staffed outpost.

Of course, unmanned probes can accomplish as much or more for a bare fraction of the cost – look at NASA's Spirit rover, still rolling around like R2D2 on the Martian surface and sending back data to Earth, 10 times longer than its best-before date. So the latest lunar lunacy isn't so much about science. It's about corporate welfare for the aerospace industry, patriotic whoopee, and the PNAC-inspired domination of space.

Daft as it is (especially considering the Sisyphean US federal debt of \$44 trillion), the mooted moon/Mars missions trade on some heavy-duty narratives – specifically the story about God booting Adam and Eve from Eden. In its updated, secular version, the exit from the garden is voluntary, as we leave the overpopulated, toxic Earth behind for distant worlds.

I'm reminded of the bumper-sticker, "Earth First: We'll destroy the other planets later."

There is skepticism that NASA will be given enough funds to pull off an actual manned moon mission. But with the urgent priorities at home, such Space Age ballyhoo seems rather dated, and dangerous. It makes us Homo sapiens seem little more than a mindlessly replicating virus, threatening its planetary host, as Agent Smith contemptuously remarked to Morpheus in *The Matrix*.

Or how about a fungus? A contributor from the 2005 blog called *The Broad View* offered a mycelial metaphor for Republicans: "Today, American democracy is stunted and dying, eaten by a vast, hidden fungus that is attacking the roots of our liberties. It could be called *Armillaria ostoyae* Republicanus and its fruiting bodies are Bush, Cheney, Yoo, Armitage, Gonzales, Libby, DeLay, Abramoff and many more clumps of poisonous death-caps in Congress and the state houses. Their trail of spores leads to Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, black sites, NSA listening posts, paid journalist shills, dubious election practices, crony corruption, gerrymandered districts and institutionalized lying and intimidation."

Dick Cheney may seem more fungi than fun guy, but I think the Republican comparison is unfair – unfair to fungus, that is. We've certainly got problems with warmongering fabulists, but

we should leave the mycelial networks out of it. Besides, the “fruiting caps” of Gonzalez, Libby, Delay and Abramoff have all either resigned or been indicted. Barring any surprises, the rest of the crew has only nine months to go, though their legacy of inflated executive power, domestic surveillance and hi-tech lobbying will likely outlast them.

Republicans and mushrooms, like Rodney Dangerfield, get no respect. But an American author and mycologist based in Washington State is working on changing people’s perceptions about fungi. It’s an uphill battle, Paul Stamets told an audience at a March 2008 TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) conference in Long Beach, California. “Frankly, I face a big problem when I mention mushrooms to somebody. People think I mean either Portobello or magic mushrooms; their eyes glaze over and they think I’m a little crazy.” Stamets, who is on the editorial board of *The International Journal of Medici-*

insects and lobsters – is closer to fungi than any other kingdom. We share the same pathogens, which explains why fungi produce strong antibiotics.

Stamets went on to show pictures of an experiment he coordinated with Battelle laboratories on soil reclamation, using our piles of garbage, saturated with diesel and other petroleum wastes. One was a control pile; one pile was treated with enzymes; another pile was treated with bacteria; and the last pile was inoculated with mushroom mycelium. Six weeks later, the tarps were removed. All were dark, rank piles of waste, with the exception of Stamets’ pile, a tan-coloured heap covered with hundreds of pounds of oyster mushrooms.

The mycelium had absorbed the oil, producing enzymes that break carbon bonds. “The enzymes remanufactured the hydrocarbons into carbohydrates – fungal sugars.” It was one of the epiphanies in Stamets’ life, he says. The mushrooms sporulated; “Spores attract insects, insects lay eggs, eggs became larvae, birds then came, brining in seeds,

that mycelium is our planet’s natural Internet. He argues that nodes and branching and redundant pathways are common to both. “I believe the invention of the computer Internet is the inevitable consequence of a previously proven, biologically successful node,” the author told his TED audience.

Is Stamets reading a bit too much into his mycelial networks – like the proverbial guy with a hammer who sees every problem as a nail? Yet there’s no denying he’s talking about some very old, and very hardy, biotech, with some amazing properties. And we are the newcomers, after all. If the history of life were compressed into a month, with one day equal to 150 million years, modern human beings appeared only in the last 10 minutes of day 30. All of human history is found in the final three seconds. All of our science is a third of a second long. The fungi, which arrived on the scene weeks prior to us, even before the plants – which could not exist until fungi could crumble rock down into soil with their powerful acids – have had plenty of time to figure out their silent, stealthy form of bioregionalism.

As a species, we pride ourselves on our technical feats. Yet billions of years before our ancestors scratched out the phases of the moon on pieces of ivory, lowly, one-celled creatures were experiencing their own triumph of the nerds. “Informationally linked microorganisms possessed a skill exceeding the capacities of any supercomputer from Cray Research or Fujitsu,” notes polymath scholar Howard Bloom in his book *The Global Brain*. “The microbial global brain – gifted with long range transport, data trading, genetic variants from which to pluck fresh secrets and the ability to reinvent genomes – began its operations some 91 trillion bacterial generations before the birth of the Internet,” Bloom writes.

Beginning in the eighties, a small number of brave thinkers, like James Lovelock and cell biologist Lynn Margulis, began to think of Earth’s biosphere in a new way: as a supremely intelligent meta-system of interdependent organisms. The theory was radical then, but is almost respectable now and is starting to find its way into practical applications. Across the world, urban planners, policy analysts and materials scientists are studying biological systems for clues on how to make things work, with minimal environmental impact. We’re starting to see the first results, in our streets, our building and our homes. And why not? Plants were the original solar power providers, fungi the masters of filtration, nutrient transport, and bioremediation, and bacteria the gurus of open-source biotech. We could do a lot worse than take our cue from the planet’s hardiest survivors. All we have to do is avoid hare-brained schemes like using agricultural land for growing biofuels.

For Stamets, it’s all about symbiosis:

“Being ecologically intelligent about our fuel system, and building up the carbon bands for the planet, to renew the soils for the species we need to join with. I think engaging mycelium can help save the world.” The TED audience gave the mycologist a standing ovation.

Science fiction writer H. G. Wells once observed that civilization is a race between education and catastrophe. The educator, as ever, is that harsh matron, Mother Earth. By now, it’s so obvious it shouldn’t need to be said, but until we fix the mess at home, escape to other worlds is not a realistic option.

It’s time to stop crying for the moon and get back to work in the garden.

(Paul Stamets TED talk, *6 Ways Mushrooms Can Save the World*, is viewable on YouTube.)

mwiseguise@yahoo.com

The 2,200-acre organism in Malheur National Forest in the Blue Mountains of Eastern Oregon isn’t just the largest fungal colony in the world. As far as we know, it’s the biggest organism on the planet. This whopper has a total mass estimated as much as 605 tons, although its mycelial net is only one-cell thick.

nal Mushrooms and an advisor to the Program for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona Medical School, has become the world’s biggest cheerleader for mycelial networks.

Dressed in jeans and a vest, the bearded scholar told his audience the planet is now in its sixth major extinction period. “If there were a United Nations of organisms, would we be voted on the planet or off the planet? I think that vote is occurring right now.” Yet Stamets isn’t interested in prophesying human extinction. He believes civilization’s late-stage salvation is literally under our feet, out in the rainforests.

Stamets believes mycelia are an under-utilized component of permaculture. He calls them “the grand molecular disassemblers of nature” and “the soil magicians,” that generate the humus soils across the landmasses of earth. They can hold 30,000 times their own mass. “The spongy soil not only resists erosion but sets up a microbial universe that gives rise to a plurality of other organisms.”

In his talk, Stamets drew attention to an overhead slide of a mycelium’s microfiltration membranes, resembling a network of neurons. We exhale carbon dioxide; so does mycelium. We inhale oxygen; so does mycelium. Animalia – the kingdom we share with cats, dogs,

and our pile became an oasis of life. The mycelia are gateway species, vanguard species, that open the door for other biological communities.

“Preserving the genome of these fungi in the old growth forest is absolutely critical for human health,” Stamets told his TED audience.

Stamets is a great proponent of the medicinal properties of mushrooms, and according to an entry in Wikipedia, is involved in two NIH-funded clinical studies on cancer and HIV treatments using mushrooms as adjunct therapies. At the TED conference, he unveiled the findings that fungal antibiotics aggressively combat both the common flu and virus smallpox. He has numerous patents on the antiviral, pesticidal, and remedial properties of mushroom mycelia, including a method of protecting people’s houses from Carpenter ants using mycelium.

He also insists that mycelium offers a way around our corn-based biofuel impasse, one of the factors in the global rise of food prices. The economic distortions stem from the inefficient conversion of cellulose into ethanol. Mycelium, which can turn biowaste into carbohydrates, offers a far better option for biofuel than ethanol, he says.

In the early 1990s, Stamets proposed

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Weaning from fossil fuels

EARTHFUTURE Guy Dauncey

ENVIRONMENT

Around the world, people are reeling from the increases in the price of oil. In France, where diesel costs \$2.14 a litre, fishermen recently blockaded the straits of Dover, demanding that the government step in with a subsidy. In Spain, the fishermen went on strike and 10,000 truckers also blockaded the roads around Barcelona and Madrid, saying, "We haven't got the money to buy fuel!" In England, truckers and farmers created gridlock by driving at 10 mph along roads in Cornwall, demanding a fuel subsidy of 50 cents a litre. Similar protests have been happening around the world. Some emotional commentators have fuelled the sense of crisis with headlines such as "Gas prices heading in the stratosphere" (*Financial Post*, April 17). If \$1.40 a litre is the "stratosphere," how will the *Post* express its shock when gas hits \$2 or \$5 a litre? "Gas prices leaving the galaxy, heading towards Andromeda?"

And yet, as Roosevelt said in the darkest year of the Great Depression, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." Fear gives us adrenaline, freezes the brain and simplifies everything down to one powerful instinct: run!

Future thinking is different. It starts with a vision – a post-carbon world – then directs all thinking and creativity to that end. Globally, there is evidence that post-carbon living is possible. People are already living in zero-carbon buildings, driving zero-carbon cars and producing food on organic farms without oil-based fertilizers or pesticides.

The whole of Sweden is planning to be oil independent by 2020. The small town of Gussing, in eastern Austria, has reduced its carbon footprint by a full 93

The small town of Gussing, in eastern Austria, has reduced its carbon footprint by a full 93 percent since 1995.

The price of oil will to continue to rise until we no longer need it because we have been forced to evolve beyond it. We are about to take an amazing step into the future by weaning ourselves off Nature's abundant breasts and using our own intelligence to meet our energy needs. For all of our six million years as walking humans, we have sucked our energy directly from Nature, first as roots, leaves and fruits and then as firewood. Most recently it has been fossil fuels.

But fossil fuels are a one-time gift from the past. We are burning 32 billion barrels of oil a year and if there are a thousand billion barrels left, as most estimates suggest, they will be gone in 31 years. The price of oil will leave the galaxy long before then. Alberta's oil sands, at two or three million barrels a day, make little difference in a world that burns 87 million barrels a day.

For many, the prospect of weaning seems horrible. The party's over! Without oil, we will no longer be able to feed ourselves, live in the suburbs or import the goods we need. Everything will collapse. Past thinking engenders fear and a negativity that paralyzes creativity. The fact that our use of fossil fuels also causes global warming adds a litany of grim predictions to a future we are now really afraid of.

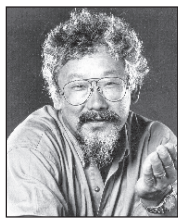
percent since 1995, using forest biomass energy, solar and waste cooking oil.

Instead of highway trucking, we can build electrified high-speed railways. Ocean going ships are being designed that run on solar, wind, waves and hydrogen. For electricity, there is a global abundance of solar, wind, geothermal and ocean energy. For heat, there are excellent heat exchange technologies, plus solar and geothermal heat. It is only with air travel that we have no obvious solutions.

For any government now facing the anger of truckers, trawlers and taxi-drivers, there is a simple solution. The problem is not the price; it is the inability of companies in a competitive industry to pass the price on without losing ground to their competitors. The solution is for the government to publish a monthly fuel surcharge and require that everyone who burns oil for a living must pass it on to their customers. Let the market sort it out, instead of hard-working truckers and their families.

In one stroke, this particular problem can be solved, allowing us to focus on the main work at hand: to build a 100 percent post-carbon world as rapidly as we can.

Guy Dauncey is president of the BC Sustainable Energy Association, He lives in Victoria. www.earthfuture.com.



The macaw and the manduvi

SCIENCE MATTERS David Suzuki with Faisal Moola

No matter how much I learn about nature, I never cease to be amazed by its mystery and complexity. That point really struck me in light of a recent study in the journal Biological Conservation about the relationship between the Hyacinth macaw, the Toco toucan and the Manduvi tree.

The Hyacinth macaw is an endangered bird in central Brazil. It has a reputation for being picky when it comes to choosing a home; it lives almost exclusively in natural hollows in Manduvi trees, which don't grow in great numbers in the region. In an effort to help preserve the bird and its habitat, Dr. Marco Pizo and his research

Because of this, the BC government has initiated a plan to kill wolves and other predators, in addition to protecting significant areas of the caribou's habitat. Such "predator control" wildlife management practices are increasingly being proposed or used elsewhere in Canada. However, because the science of predator-prey interactions is poorly understood, these methods can have severe and unintended consequences. In the case of the Hyacinth macaw, killing its main predator would ensure its demise. We must understand the broader context if we want our wildlife management plans and conservation efforts to succeed.

Whether on land or at sea, large population changes in one species can have cascading effects throughout the ecosystem.

team at the Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos explored how the Manduvi tree's seed is spread. They found that the Toco toucan collects and disperses more than 83 percent of the seeds.

So far so good. But here's the kicker: The toucan is the macaw's main predator. Besides feeding on the whole seeds of the Manduvi, the toucan also has a big appetite for macaw eggs. The researchers also observed toucans taking over macaw hollows and killing the nestlings.

And so, ironically, the macaw depends on its main predator, the toucan, for its survival.

This fascinating relationship has led to what the report's authors call "a conservation biology puzzle" because, as the report states, "Any conservation plan for Hyacinth macaws must take into account the toucans, which would not normally be done because of their predator status and because Toco toucans are not particularly threatened."

It's a puzzle that illustrates the importance of seeing the big picture when it comes to the environment. Attempting to manage a single species in isolation can't work because nature is just too complex. Take the caribou, an iconic species found throughout Canada. Caribou are in trouble across their expansive range. In BC, populations of mountain caribou that inhabit the interior rainforests have plummeted to an estimated 1,900 individuals from historic levels of about 10,000. The main threat is the destruction of their old growth forest habitat by commercial logging, but scientists believe that predators like wolves and cougars may have also played a role in the caribou's decline.

Governments have been talking about this "ecosystem approach" for some time, but so far they've been slow to act. The official name for one area off Canada's West Coast even acknowledges this broader-context approach: the Pacific North Coast Integrated Management Area, or PNCIMA. This 88,000-square-kilometre marine region next to BC's Great Bear Rainforest encompasses the central and north coast and Haida Gwaii and is home to a fascinating variety of life, from basking sharks and blue whales to massive kelp forests and glass-sponge reefs.

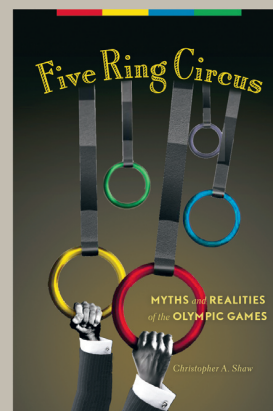
Although the federal government has committed to using an ecosystem approach for managing the PNCIMA, it has done little to implement the process. Environmental groups, including the David Suzuki Foundation, used World Ocean Day, June 8, to draw attention to this fact and to the lack of marine protected areas in Canada's ocean territories.

Like the Earth's forests, oceans are complex environments where everything is interconnected. Whether on land or at sea, large population changes, including extinction, in one species can have cascading effects throughout the ecosystem.

Good conservation planning requires efforts by local communities and governments at all levels to base decisions on ecosystems as a whole. And we must keep in mind that we're a part of that whole, even though our relationship with nature is often as complex and tricky as the relationship between the Hyacinth macaw and the Toco toucan.

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Bill C-51: How it will affect your health and what our readers say

more at www.commonground.ca

Wake-up call

Bill C-51 has become a wake-up call for the average Canadian, grabbing the public's attention and becoming a commonly discussed topic. Regardless of which side one takes – STOP or AMEND – this political exercise shows that health rights and freedoms are cherished by Canadians and are not to be taken for granted. With one side of the country connecting the other side of the country at the grassroots level, this will no doubt become an election issue.

*Lorna Hancock, Executive Director,
Health Action Network*

Targeting natural products?

Health Canada says Bill C-51 isn't targeting natural products, but that's not clear. Bill C-51 includes sensible advancements, but it also gives Health Inspectors the power to act even without reasonable cause; that's a problem lying in wait. Inspectors have the same imperfections as the rest of us and errors could cause irreparable harm to natural product suppliers and seriously inconvenience customers. Bill C-51 includes other provisions, including research requirements that could have unintended consequences. Bill C-51 needs changes to make the law workable within practical limitations of reasonable and effective implementation, before being enacted. Some politicians are listening – David Emerson, James Lunney and Joyce Murray – and so is Health Minister Tony Clement, who introduced changes on June 12. Consumers should remain diligent to ensure that changes and other improvements are implemented into Bill C-51 as it progresses.

Michael Bentley, Sierrasil, Vancouver

Worst aspects

Here is my summary of the worst aspects of the long and complex Bill C-51, which doesn't seem to have any positive attributes:

1. All natural health products (other than food) will become "therapeutic products."
2. Every natural health product seller must separately license each product and pay a fee to renew this license every year. The proposed fees alone will more than double the prices you are paying today.
3. To sell a "therapeutic product" without a license will be deemed "prescribing" and will render naturopathic, homeopathic and traditional Chinese medicine practitioners, along with other practitioners of natural healthcare and stores selling natural products, liable to prosecution.
4. The prescribing of natural health products will be restricted to licensed

practitioners, therefore, members of the public may lose the right to possess any natural health product, including all herbals, without a prescription. Typically, when any product becomes subject to prescription, the price increases ten-fold.

5. Information about the ingredients of natural health products – in any form, including newsletters, magazines, books, emails, even peer-reviewed papers – will be deemed part of the natural product label, with the threat of prosecution if the information doesn't agree with views held by Health Canada.

6. Government-appointed inspectors will have the power to enter your home or place of business, at any time, without warning or a warrant. If they find a controlled herb or vitamin without a prescription, you could face seizure of your home and possessions, fines of up to \$250,000 and/or imprisonment for peer-reviewed papers – up to six months for a first offence.

The last time Canadians spoke out against similar proposals, it was the biggest outcry from the people in Canadian history. Hence, a special category was developed: Food, Drugs, & NHP (natural health products). Big Pharma is now again trying to gain control of a very lucrative market, encompassing 70 percent of Canadians. It's nothing personal, just smart business. It's time to tell government again, loudly, to leave natural health products alone.

*Dr Michael Colgan, Colgan Institute
www.colganinstitute.com*

Overregulation and monopoly

In order to ensure an innovative and competitive industry, we must NOT over-regulate and cause a monopolization of the industry by a few large firms. In Australia, the industry went from hundreds of manufacturers to only four in 10 years, after Bill C-51 style regs were introduced. Our radio show *Health Empowerment* with Croft Woodruff has received a large amount of feedback from listeners about Bill C-51 and the message is clear. People do not want their foods, vitamins, minerals, enzymes and fatty acids treated like drugs. These products are safe and effective.

*Andrew McGivern, co-founder and
director, Omira Health Centers Inc
www.omirahealth.com*

Different and safer

The tough language of Bill C-51 appears to threaten Canada's Natural Health Products and services. However, Health Canada officials and Members of Parliament assure us that this bill will not touch existing NHP regulations, but just

update old Food and Drug regulations. They agree that NHPs are "different than and safer than" drugs and they are aware that Canadians will be very upset if Natural Health Products and services are unfairly restricted. I hope Health Canada keeps its promises.

*Bob McCandless, Master Herbalist,
Vancouver*

Delay too long

The Natural Health Products Drug Regulations, Bills C-51 and C-52, clearly do not belong in our Rule of Law and constitutional, democratic and people-focused society. Given the absurd and blatantly transparent stance of this government against the wishes and safety of Canadians, there is no need to waste time on any more studies, especially in light of the government's record of inaction on previous promises. The 1998 Standing Committee Report has covered all the necessary points and must be implemented promptly. A ten-year delay is too long already.

Chris Gupta, P.Eng., London, Ontario

Towing the line

While Health Minister Tony Clements claims that C-51 is about increasing safety, many who've read the fine print are cynical of the real driving force behind the proposed bill. And for good reason. Over the last year, Canadian pesticide rules have been weakened; Bill C-517 to label genetically engineered organisms was defeated; and the HPV vaccine was given the red carpet, despite very serious reactions and troubling questions behind its lobbying. This, coupled with a record of top Health Canada scientists being gag ordered for not towing the pharma-cartel line, and the well documented revolving door between industry and regulators over concerns as diverse as aspartame and the wireless industry, clearly unveils the hypocrisy of what is preached versus practised when it comes to "protecting" Canadians.

*Rukshana Enjjineer,
Vancouver*

Compromising integrity

In the mid-1990s, the federal government attempted to classify and regulate a large group of medicinal herbs, including common spices, under the category of drugs. The resulting public outrage directly led to a classic Canadian compromise position, which created a third category called natural health products (NHPs) that were neither foods nor drugs. With Bill C-51, the government wants to place NHPs in the same category as drugs, under a larger classification called "thera-

peutic products." This compromises both the integrity of NHPs as an independent category and future access by non-medical practitioners, who make up the majority of those who actually use them.

*Todd Caldecott, Dip. Cl.H,
RH(AHG), ayurvedic practitioner,
medical herbalist, Vancouver
www.toddcaldecott.com*

Change it or scrap it

Many people have written me to express their concerns about Bill C-51, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act. My colleagues and I in the NDP caucus oppose Bill C-51 as it now stands. We have taken this position for a number of reasons, including the view that it may open the door to direct-to-consumer advertising of pharmaceuticals, that it puts too much power in the hands of the Minister of Health, and that it may be a thinly veiled attempt to regulate natural health products.

The NDP has always viewed natural health products as a vital component of our health care system and believes that a separate category is needed for licensing purposes, and ensuring safety and efficacy. Bill C-51 lumps natural health products and traditional medicines in with drugs under a category being called "therapeutic products," which appears to reverse a long-standing position of having a separate regulatory framework. This, combined with a huge backlog in the licensing of natural health products – a consequence of flawed implementation by consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments – has raised alarm bells. For these reasons and other concerns related to advertising, adverse reactions and life cycle licensing, we are opposed to Bill C-51 as it is presently written. If it is sent to committee, we want to see a comprehensive study with enough time for a full range of witnesses. It is essential that this bill not pass without the amendments necessary to set up a reasonable approach for dealing with natural health products. Thanks to all of those who have been in touch with me to raise concerns about Bill C-51.

Libby Davies, MP, Vancouver East

Town hall meeting

I am very concerned about the Conservative government's proposed changes to regulations covering natural healthcare and products contained in Bill C-51. That is why I invited you to join me and my special guests at a Town Hall meeting to discuss the potential impact of this bill.

What effect will C-51 have on your access to natural health products, your naturopathic physician, traditional Chi-

nese medicine and other forms of complementary medicine and therapy? Just where do we stand? And where do we go from here? This forum gave us an opportunity to hear about and be heard from regarding these important questions. [Joyce Murray's invitation resulted in an overflow crowd at Kits House in Kitsilano on June 13.]

Joyce Murray, MP,
Vancouver Quadra

Understanding the context

Bill C-51 needs to be understood in the greater context of where the regulatory environment for Natural Health Products (NHPs) stands today. Although natural health products have their own set of regulations, they are currently defined as a subset of drugs under the Food and Drug Act (F&DA). Industry has expressed growing concern that the interpretation and implementation of these regulations is being done through a pharma lens. Although the regulations are not perfect, current industry issues tend to stem primarily from the interpretation and implementation of the regulations by government. This is an important distinction.

The Natural Health Products Directorate (NHPD) is the branch of Health Canada charged with regulating our industry. Therefore, this concern with unfair interpretation of the regulations rests with them. Many in our industry feel that the Standards of Evidence requirements are too stringent, given the low risk profile of our products. Further, there is little perceived transparency within the NHPD and many in industry feel that the regulations are being applied inconsistently and without sufficient consultation with stakeholders. There are other significant concerns as well.

The 1998 Report of the Standing Committee on Health made 53 recommendations to government, which would form the guidance basis of the proposed regulations. The very first recommendation calls for the Food and Drugs Act to be "amended accordingly" to recognize NHPs as unique. The NHPD, however, has not made this a priority and does not understand the need to define NHPs as a separate category.

Suddenly, Bill C-51 appears with proposed amendments that would fundamentally change the Food and Drugs Act. Our industry was not consulted in any meaningful way and no separate category was even mentioned. In fact, our NHPs were further entrenched under the drug framework by placing them under the all-encompassing category of "Therapeutic Products."

Given this context, we can now look at what the response to C-51 has been. Some groups are calling to kill the bill outright. Others, such as the Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA), are calling to amend the bill to create a separate category for NHPs. Those wanting to

stop the bill are looking at the potential negative impact of specific provisions within the bill. Those wanting to amend the bill are looking at this as an opportunity to get that separate category we were promised when we, as an industry, initially accepted the regulations. The two positions are not mutually exclusive. The CHFA has noted several areas within the bill that are of major concern. However, those calling to kill the bill have had a much easier job in creating a simple message for the public and much confusion between the two positions has resulted. It is much easier to say, "kill the bill" than it is to start talking about categories, standards of evidence, etc.

Where is all this headed? The bill has not yet passed second reading, but when and if it does, it will go to the current Standing Committee on Health which will analyze it in detail, invite witnesses from various interest groups to speak and then make any necessary recommendations for amendment before returning it to parliament for final reading.

One possible outcome is that public outcry over the bill (and there is a lot of that) will stop it from proceeding further. Another possibility is that the CHFA will be successful in lobbying for a separate category and therefore have the bill amended. Possibly, all these efforts will have no effect at all and the bill will proceed into law. Lastly, there could be a federal election call at which point the bill will simply die.

My personal hope is that we attain a separate category now and then remain at the bargaining table to ensure that the category truly reflects the interests of Canadian consumers of natural health products. Our industry has to make a standing commitment to engage government on all levels so that our voice is heard.

Ben Banky, www.tallgrass.biz

Battle not over

On Friday June 13, Minister of Health Tony Clement and Penny Marrett, president of the Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA), officially declared "Battle Ground C-51" to be over. All Canadians can safely return to their homes and rest assured that the CHFA and Clement will protect their constitutional rights and freedoms. Ms. Marrett agreed that the proposed amendments have resolved the concerns of more than three million Canadians, who rose up in June to protest the action of Minister Clement in attempting to destroy the constitutional rights of Canadians.

More than 75 percent of Canadians use a natural health product on a regular basis. Bill C-51 challenges their right to do so. In an attempt to quell the uprising among the MPs in the House of Commons and concerned Canadians, Clement has brought forward a small token offer to reduce slightly the damage that Health Canada will do to our Constitutional rights. Health Canada cannot be

given discretionary powers; its criminal actions in the past have demonstrated corruption and abuse. In the 2006 court case Regina vs. Truehope, uncontested testimony given under oath by the Canadian Mental Health Association showed that Health Canada's actions led to the death of innocent Canadians. Health Canada's Assistant Deputy Minister Meena Ballantyne reviewed the case and stated, "Health Canada fully supports actions taken..."

We continue to say no to Bill C-51 and its amendments. Accepting the amendments and sending the bill to standing committee is the same as signing a blank cheque for government abuse. Accept nothing less than the removal of C-51. We want a new Natural Health Products Act, administered not by Health Canada, but rather by the people. For more info, visit www.stopc51.com

Anthony Stephan, True Hope
Raymond, Alberta

Amending the bill

While it's great that the government has been alerted to the passionate concern for access to natural health products, I haven't been persuaded that suppression of access plays any role whatsoever in the government's intention with this bill. There is a difference between intent and unintended consequences and, in this regard, the officials I've listened to seem anxious to amend the bill to eliminate any ambiguities that could be misapplied. There are definitely hang-ups with importation and access to certain products that have yet to be solved, but these are issues unrelated to C-51.

Dr. Neil Tessler, ND, president,
Homeopathic Academy of
Naturopathic Physicians

Myth or reality

The federal Bill C-51, the Food and Drugs Act, has triggered strong opposition from the natural health products (NHP) industry and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) communities. Since it will have a grave adverse impact on TCM, I lent my support to the opposition.

Faced with the strong reaction, Health Minister Tony Clement and his Conservative MPs tried to pacify the public. They said the bill wouldn't affect the current regulations controlling NHP and TCM. It's unfortunate that words and promises made by our federal and provincial ministers nowadays are not very credible. The ministers often say one thing and act differently. The Health Minister's "promise" concerning Bill C-51 is simply misleading the public. Readers who are interested to read the contradiction between Clement's words and the fact, in its entirety, can find it in the "Myth and Reality" section of the Coalition Against Bill C-51's website: www.ACoalitionAgainstBillC51.com.

Gabriel Yiu, Dawa Business Press

Omnibus definition

Bill C-51 is now dead. The House has closed and members did not bring the proposed bill up for second reading, even though it was regularly on the order papers every day. We have been heard and they are regrouping. The Liberals, at the last minute, decided not to support this bill after all. The bill will now have to be re-introduced with Tony Clement's proposed amendments when they get back to work in September and they will have to start it from scratch at first reading. It is, therefore, vitally important that they don't even think about bringing it back, in any shape or form, with no matter how many amendments, because this bill is pernicious from start to finish and nothing will improve it.

What most people have not yet grasped is that bill C-52 has gone through second reading and will go to committee in September. If C-51 was pernicious, C-52 is outright diabolical. Furthermore, C-51 can be tagged onto C-52 by an Order in Council (cabinet decision without parliamentary debate, media inquiry, public input via our respective MP's office etc. - passed into law without discussion!) if they feel like it and to avoid another public uproar.

Secondly, C-52 has an omnibus definition of "hazardous products" like C-51 did with "therapeutic products" and their definition of a "hazardous product" includes the media. My letter to you could be defined as such a product. Due to this omnibus definition as the basis of the entire bill, they can import any other hazard, as they see fit. The current act governing hazardous products overlaps in many of its provisions explicitly with the current Food and Drugs Act, so they are within their rights to assume that the areas of responsibility in both C-51 and C-52 may also overlap, should either become law.

My book *What Part of No! Don't They Understand?* covers both bills. My view is that we need to take the government to court and do a Charter challenge on C-52 as soon as parliament resumes, so the committee cannot discuss it until the court has ruled. If we allow the committee process to start, the expert witnesses will be brought forward that the government wants, and the committee is stacked - mostly Liberals and Conservatives who both support this bill.

Why do they support this bill? Both bills are strictly intended to serve the purposes of NAFTA and now the Security and Prosperity Partnership Of North America (SPP). The US just brought in a law that takes liability away from the consumer of implants. This was the main reason Ireland voted no to the EU Constitution on June 12. Read the SPP documents and you will see what I mean. Health and hazardous products are explicitly mentioned in this and other treaties.

Helke Ferrie, KOS Publishing

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20,000 healthcare products lost to date

by John Biggs

Since 2004, Health Canada's Natural Health Products (NHPs) Regulations have forced more than 20,000 products off the Canadian market. The US companies shown below used to sell their products in Canada, prior to the 2004 implementation of the Natural Health Products Regulations. Following a seven-year process in which the number one request of Canadians was increased access to more natural health products, and in which NHPs were supposed to have been given their own category separate from either Foods or Drugs, Health Canada came out with the Natural Health Product Regulations. Not only did these regulations classify natural products as drugs without providing the new category, they were supposed to protect Canadians' access to NHPs. The list below shows that they have had the opposite effect. There are literally multiple thousands of products (20,000 plus) that Canadian stores can no longer get or sell. Note that this list does not reflect the products that were lost when Canadian companies shortened their pricelist due to the cost of complying with the regulations.

1. Solaray, Kal, and all other products produced by Nutraceutical Inc. – over 5,000 products offered in its US pricelist. Sold in Canada for more than 10 years.
2. HerbPharm – sold in Canada for more than 10 years.
3. Gaia Herbals – sold in Canada for more than 10 years.
4. Allergy Research Products – over 650 extremely high quality natural products of all sorts – sold in Canada for more than 10 years.
5. Country Life – Hundreds of high quality natural products in tablets and capsules – sold for more than 10 years in Canada.
6. Source Naturals – 2,300 products in two lines representing a full range of nutraceuticals. Will not ship to Canada because of all the shipments held at the border.
7. Vitamin Research Products – 400+ innovative, well-researched products that are flagged and regularly denied entry at the border.
8. Jarrow products – 600+ well-researched, high quality products. Submitted product licence applications, but gave up in frustration with shipments being blocked at the border.
9. Herbasway – producers of green tea products – no longer available.
10. Yogi Teas – these are just herbal

teas – most are no longer available due to the regulations.

11. Sweet Wheat – high quality wheat grass products – no longer available.

12. Bernard Jensen products – available in Canada since the 1970s – no longer sold due to the regulations.

13. Organic Essentials – organic tampons – disallowed because their applicator was considered a medical device by Health Canada.

14. Zand Herbals – hundreds of herbal products sold in Canada since the 1980s – pulled out of Canada after the regs went into effect.

15. Life Extension Products – hundreds of extremely well-researched NHPs no longer allowed into Canada for commercial sale.

16. Dr. Christopher's Original Formulas – 200+ herbal formulas sold in Canada since the 1970s. No longer available.

17. Vaxa – no longer allowed across the border due to the regulations.

18. Robert Grey Cleansing products – sold in Canada since the 1980's – have pulled out of Canada.

19. Natrol – over 1,000 products. Sold in Canada until the regulations went into effect.

20. Houston Nutraceuticals – Enzymes used to improve digestion in kids. Available until the regulations came into effect. All commercial shipments were then refused entry.

Dozens of Canadian distributors of NHPs are experiencing great economic hardship because Health Canada is stopping their shipments at the Canada/US border. Most of these are products for which product licence applications have already been submitted. In addition, when the regulations came into effect, almost every Canadian NHP supplier shortened their pricelist (sometimes dramatically), because of the cost involved in submitting the applications for licensing each product. This is a drug-style approval system that was never supposed to be applied to NHPs, as per the Expert Advisory Committee, the Standing Committee on Health and Parliament. They mandated that Health Canada should produce regulations that reflected the inherent safety and low risk levels of these products. As you can see, they have done the opposite.

John Biggs, owner Optimum Health, Edmonton, www.optimumhealthvitamins.com (Adapted from a letter originally sent by John Biggs to Ottawa.)



Backyard berry patch

ON THE GARDEN PATH Carolyn Herriot

A daily serving of fruits and berries is critical for good health and fighting disease. No need to go to the store in winter to buy cardboard strawberries; there's lots of them from my garden in the freezer. I freeze berries in single layers on a baking sheet and this works for rhubarb chunks too. When berries are frozen individually, you only use as many as you need. Growing fruit also means adding ornamental edibles to your garden. It's pure joy to harvest fresh fruit

straw, compost or manure twice a year. This boosts fruit production and helps prevent weed growth.

Blackcurrants produce fruit on one-year-old wood. In spring, remove old wood and weak canes leaving six to nine strong ones. **Redcurrants** and gooseberries produce on spurs of two and three-year-old wood. Wood older than three years should be removed each year. Allow only eight or nine strong canes to remain on the bush after pruning. Short-

It's pure joy to harvest fresh fruit in season, and kids really love it, as they eat more than they pick!

in season, and kids really love it as they eat more than they pick!

Kiwis: *Actinidia deliciosa* are vigorous broadleaf deciduous vining shrubs. They thrive in a pH between 6.0 and 7.0. When carrying a full crop, and during the hottest part of summer, mature vines may use up to 20 litres of water a day, depending on soil type. Frost protection is needed in areas where there are early fall or late spring frosts.

Kiwis are dioecious vines, with male and female flowers on separate plants. To get fruit, you need one male to every six females. Vines bloom over a 10-day period, starting mid-June. You also need healthy populations of honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) and bumblebees (*Bombus terrestris*) for pollination. Fruit should not ripen on the vine, as mature fruit has a short life.

Grapes should be planted in well-drained, moist, loamy soil in full sun. Apply manure in spring and mulch with grass clippings throughout the year. Apply wood ash (uncontaminated) in winter and seaweed in summer. Fruit is produced on the current season's growth, which grows from last year's wood.

Raspberries should be planted in early spring, two feet apart in the row. It is advisable to support the plants with a wired framework. Canes will spread so dig up the creepers outside the wired support. The plants need six hours of full sun daily with soil pH 6.0. wood ash in winter. Add seaweed in summer and manure/compost mulch in late winter after fruiting.

Currants and gooseberries belong to the genus *Ribes*. They are excellent for jams, jellies, and winemaking. They will grow in full sun to partial shade. Avoid low-lying frost pockets. Space five feet apart. Mulch to retain moisture with

en any long canes for side branching and fruit spur development.

Blueberries need acidic soil (pH 5.0). A sawdust mulch five inches thick will lower the pH. Blueberries prefer well-drained soil, rich in organic matter and at least six hours of sunlight daily. Set plants six feet apart. It takes two years for plants to establish and start fruiting. Choose early, mid-season and late varieties to extend the harvest season. It's best to have more than one variety for pollination. Watch for birds as blueberries become ripe. Use netting to cover the bushes.

Strawberries prefer well-drained sandy loams, rich in organic matter with slightly acidic soil, pH 6.0. Plant in spring with crowns just above the soil surface. When first planted, add organic fertilizer to help establish them. Keep them weed-free, as they are unable to compete with grass and weeds. A southern exposure gives the sweetest fruit. Three years of production, second year best.

Rhubarb, *Rheum rhaponticum*, is a long-lived, hardy perennial, virtually pest and disease free. It's easy to grow if you remember that it is a heavy feeder; feed with manure in spring and fall. Leaves contain toxic levels of oxalic acid and should not be eaten, but can be added to the compost pile. Stop harvesting by mid-summer to leave foliage to feed roots. To keep crowns producing, divide every three years. Fall is the best time, but it can also be done in early spring.

Carolyn Herriot is author of *A Year on the Garden Path: A 52-Week Organic Gardening Guide*. She grows "Seeds of Victoria" at The Garden Path Centre www.earthfuture.com/gardenpath from where she blogs The New Victory Garden online. www.gardenwise.ca

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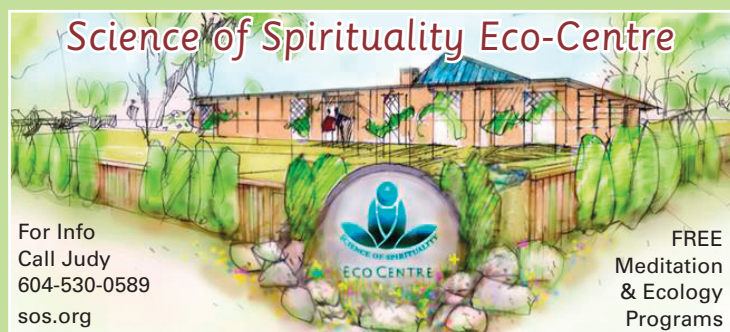
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Ecology of the soul



by Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj

The word ecology is from the Greek *oiko*, meaning house or dwelling place, and ecologists concern themselves with our earthly house. Working to clean up our polluted air and water or to free animals and birds trapped in oil spills, they are the

vapour condenses into water droplets, which pour down as rain or snow, nourishing life. For countless ages, this cycle has brought water from the oceans to the land so that animals and people can have fresh water to drink, and so that green plants can flourish.

Our most precious wealth, the soul or consciousness, lies buried beneath layers of illusion, matter and mind. These ecologists of the soul help us tap this wealth during our present lifespan, to recover our greatest resource.

environmental heroes and heroines of our times.

In our world, there are also ecologists of the soul, beings who have realized the pristine beauty of the spirit and who are aware of those mental pollutants which cover it. Our most precious wealth, the soul or consciousness, lies buried beneath layers of illusion, matter and mind. These ecologists of the soul help us tap this wealth during our present lifespan, to recover our greatest resource. Most of us already know about the science of earthly ecology, but we need to learn something about the inner science, the ecology of the soul.

Natural cycles

Sea water evaporates, forming clouds of vapour which are blown across the land. When these clouds meet cooler air,

Green plants in turn convert water, sunlight and carbon dioxide into food and oxygen. Through this process, the earth receives a fresh supply of oxygen, necessary for animal and human life, and an inexhaustible supply of plant food. Like the natural water and plant cycles, there is also a cycle of the soul. The soul began its journey aeons ago with the creation of the universes and has been in motion ever since, inhabiting the various planes of creation, taking up residence in one life form or another. Nothing is ever lost in nature. The soul, being a spark of the immortal God, never dies; when one life is over, it simply begins another in a new form.

Effects of pollution

For millions of years, our earth has had clean air and fresh, flowing waters,

continued p.30...

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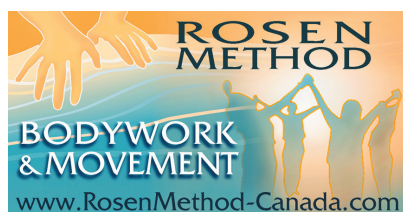


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*The problem with common sense is
that it's not common.*
– Mark Twain

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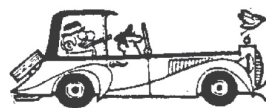
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– David Starr Jordan

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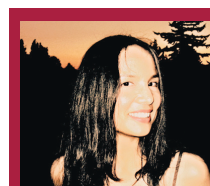
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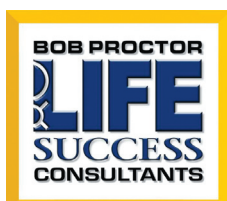
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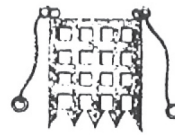


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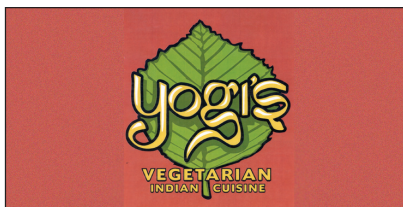
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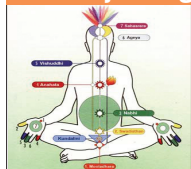
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...continued from p. 22

but in our exploitation of the planet, we have polluted the air, water and soil and are now destroying the earth's ozone layer, its forests, its animals.

Similarly, our appetite for gratifying the senses has polluted the natural purity of our soul. Sights and sounds, aromas and tastes, and all the other intriguing sensations of the world have attracted our attention, which is the outer expression of the soul. After aeons of coming and going in the world, our soul has become so covered with the pollution of worldly impressions that we cannot recognize it.

Some fortunate souls, however, experience an awakening and come to realize that there is a spiritual significance to life. When the questions "Who are we? Why are we here?" and "Where do we go after death?" arise within us, they show that a spiritual spark is ignited. We cannot rest until we find the answers. A sincere cry issues forth from deep within us and we pray to God for help and guidance.

Restoring the beauty of the soul

Ecologists of the soul are better known to us as saints and mystics, prophets and spiritual teachers who have come throughout the ages. They have freed themselves of all that pollutes the soul and they are able to free others.

They have liberated their own souls from the limits of the physical body and have soared above on the pure, divine stream back to God. These saints and teachers teach us how to analyze ourselves and separate our soul from the layers that cover it. They do this by teaching us meditation, the science of inverting our attention from the outer world to the world within. We learn to withdraw from the outer senses to a point within us known as the third eye, located at the eye-focus between and behind the two eyebrows. Many sacred texts refer to this point as *ajna chakra*, *daswan dwar*, *divya chakshu*, and (in the Bible) the single eye: "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."

The saints teach this method of meditation to all of us who sincerely wish to rediscover our true selves by rising above the senses and crossing the inner planes, ultimately to merge with our Source. Some people worry that a merger with God means the annihilation of our soul, but this is not the case. Rather than losing our identity, we gain the infinite consciousness of God. We begin to see the unity and interconnectedness of all life; we see His light radiating in all. With this realization, comes deep and sincere love for all creatures, from the tiniest of insects to every bud and flower in creation. A verse written

by a mystic says: "A true saint loves not only the flowers. He loves even the thorns."

Dedicated ecologists feel a great sense of duty towards preserving the purity of the environment, and those who discover themselves and realize God also feel a sense of responsibility. One sees the hand of God behind every blade of grass, and this respect and love for life manifests itself in service. So those who realize God don't leave the world to spend their lives in isolated meditation. They develop a desire to serve humanity and all life. This may come as a surprise to those who think that spirituality is life-negating and meant for recluses and monks. That approach is called "negative mysticism." The true science of spirituality is quite the opposite: it is a path of "positive mysticism." While pursuing our spiritual goals, we continue to fulfill our obligations to our family, community, nation and the world, to the best of our ability.

By devoting our time to spiritual practices such as meditation, we can recover the innate, God-given beauty of our soul. Once we develop spiritually, we will reflect our inner radiance to all with whom we come in contact. We will, in fact, shower that love on all living things and on our planet earth. Thus, by restoring the ecological health of

our own soul, we will be purifying and uplifting all creation. Then this world will return to the state of godly bliss and ecstasy, which we were created to enjoy. These thoughts have been summed up eloquently by the poet and mystic Sant Darshan Singh Ji Maharaj in *The Cry of the Soul*:

We are but drops of the same fountain of divine beauty,
We are but waves on the great river of love.
We are diverse blossoms in the Garden of the Lord,
We have gathered in the same valley of Light.
We who dwell on this earth belong to one humanity;
There is but one God, and we are all His children.

Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj is the author of Inner and Outer Peace Through Meditation (1996) and Empowering Your Soul Through Meditation (1999), both published by Element Books. An international spiritual leader and Master of meditation, he affirms the transcendent oneness at the heart of all religions and emphasizes prayer and meditation as building blocks for achieving peace. He visits Vancouver later this summer. (Date TBA). www.sos.org.

High altitude conflict

FILMS WORTH WATCHING Robert Alstead

One film on my radar this month is the documentary *Blindsight*, the audience award winner in Berlin, Palm Springs and Los Angeles. The documentary follows six blind Tibetan teenagers as they set about climbing the 23,000-foot Lhakpa Ri on the north side of Mount Everest. Apparently, Tibetan Buddhists treat the blind as outcasts, believing that the affliction is a punishment for misdeeds in a previous life.

Director Lucy Walker (*Devil's Playground*) follows Sabriye Tenberken, a German educator whose Braille Without Borders school helps blind kids cope with their condition. To lead the expedition, she enlists the support of US climber Erik Weiheymayer, the first blind person to climb Everest. While the film has been praised for the way it captures the natural drama of the Himalayas and the dangers involved in such a venture, Walker's depiction of the conflict that arises between the US goal orientated climbers driving to get to the top of the mountain and educator Tenberken, who believes that they should be taking a more considered approach to the challenge for the kids to get the most out of it, is excellent. The film screens at the Vancouver International Film Centre, July 18-30.

Before the Rains is an enjoyable peri-

od drama, in the mold of Merchant Ivory, set in Kerala India in 1937, just before the end of British rule. Henry Moores (Linus Roache), a debonair, English spice baron, believes that, by building a private road through a mountainous forest, he will earn his fortune. His loyal Indian foreman "T.K." (Rahul Bose) is keen to help him, while also hoping to fulfill his own ambitions of making something of himself and bringing India another step forward into modernity. However, as the movement for independence gathers momentum, ominous clouds are forming on the horizon. Will the creditors cut the project short? Will Moore's extra-marital affair with Sajani (the lovely Nandita Das), one of the servant girls, imperil everything? Who does T.K. owe his loyalty to?

With sweeping rainforest vistas and impressive scenes of the building of the road, the film is easy on the eye, and the story is straightforward with the direction competently handled. I suspect that director Santosh Sivan has a subtler eye, although he is obviously catering here to a mainstream audience. The strength of the piece lies in the performances of the two male leads, which lift a spare script off the page and make this film much

more than just a run-through of familiar Fall of the Raj themes. (Opens in Vancouver on July 4.)

Robert Greenwald has made a name for himself for his pioneering distribution strategies as much for his politically charged documentaries, such as *Outfoxed* and *WalMart: The High Cost of Low Price*. He and his company Brave New Films have been at the forefront of self-distribution techniques, using the web and a huge activist network to launch new releases on thousands of community screens across North America. Having proven the effectiveness of self-distribution, he's recently opened up his network to all independent filmmakers with a new venture called The Brave New Theaters (www.bravenewtheaters.com). Using the tools provided by social networking sites, BNT con-

nects indie filmmakers with people who want to screen the films and those who want to see them.

Hopefully, this venture will raise the profile of participating filmmakers (self included) and give people more choice about what films they see. It's good to know that if you wanted to screen an indie film here in Vancouver, you wouldn't require a license for many of the films. As well as Greenwald's own docs, there's a pile on the war in Iraq, and many quality films such as John Sayles' latest *Honeydripper*, David Zeiger's *Sir! No Sir!* and Martin O'Brien's *Freedom Fuels*.

Robert Alstead made the Vancouver-set documentary *You Never Bike Alone* (<http://icycle.bravenewtheaters.com>).



Rahul Bose (L) and Linus Roache (R) in *Before The Rains*



Friends uniting for nature

by Maia Green

I lived overseas when I was young. In fact, I was lucky enough to spend some of my formative years living in the Fiji Islands. By the age of 10, I had friends living all over the world. Back then, it all seemed very simple to me. I would just start a worldwide environmental club and save the planet. I thought if everyone I knew invited all of their friends to join, soon enough, every person in the world would be doing good things for the environment every day, and the planet would be just fine.

As it turns out, it wasn't quite that simple, and even after all these years, the planet still needs our help. So what are we going to do about it? Educate. Educate. Educate!

We need to create passionate and talented leaders who can take on today's challenges with hope and creativity. I was inspired to take action as a child; now, as an adult, I am also inspired to take action. Now, however, it is about inspiring youth to take action themselves.

I have taken my first step toward making this happen by founding the non-profit organization Friends Uniting for Nature (FUN). It is the mandate of FUN to increase

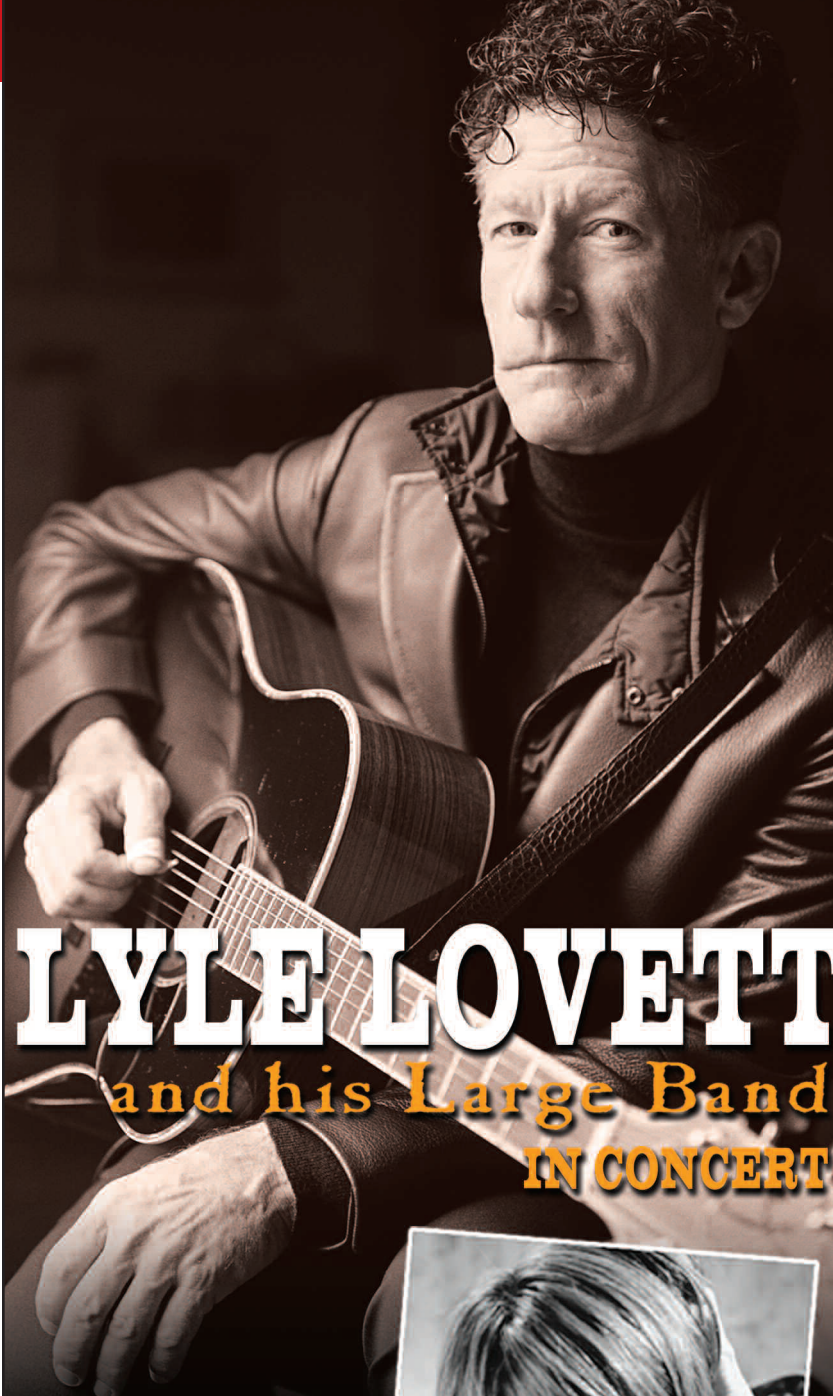
the amount of environmental education available to youth in BC. This summer, we are launching FUN Camps, a daily summer program for 10 to 15 year-old youth that focuses on environmental education, leadership skills and most of all FUN!

The program guides youth in living sustainably in an urban environment, while also giving them the passion and the tools to pass this knowledge on. The camps will be packed with exciting games, sports, arts, drama, hiking and specialized activities, such as the creation of solar powered cars, bike maintenance workshops and a visit to the UBC Farm.

FUN Camps has also launched a Sponsor-a-Student scholarship program, enabling individuals and businesses in the community to sponsor youth who would otherwise not be able to afford summer camp programs. Interested parties may make an online donation and receive a tax receipt.

For more information about registration or making donations, please contact Maia Green at maia@funcamps.ca or visit www.funcamps.ca. The camps run Monday to Friday from 9 AM to 4 PM, beginning July 7. The cost is \$185 per week.

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JUL 12, 19

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JUL 21

What is a vaccine? Seminar: Vaccinations - Yes/No? Little Nest, 1716 Charles Street \$15.00. \$5.00 returned on arrival. Call Access Natural Healing 604-568-4663 12:00-1:00pm

JUL 24

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SOS (Science of Spirituality): See Resource Directory listing in Spiritual Practices for schedule in Richmond, Vancouver & Victoria. 604-277-1247. All Welcome. www.sos.org

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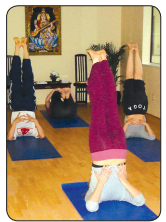


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Children of War fundraiser: At Chai Gallery, upstairs at East is East. Local musicians & traditional dancers, 7:30PM-1:30AM, 3243 W. Broadway. \$25/door, 778-837-1862, www.thechildrenofwar.org

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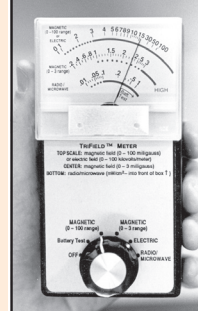
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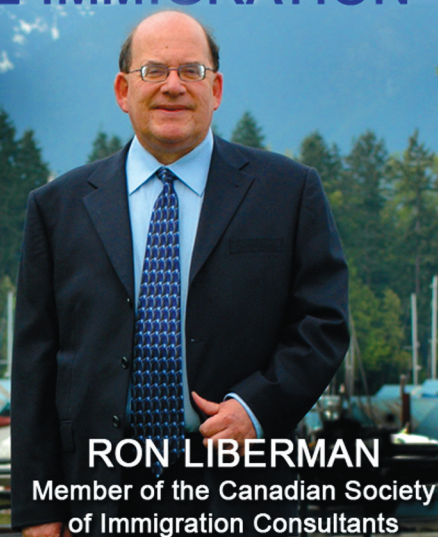
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On Track Zodiac

JULY 2008 Adrien Dillon



ARIES (Mar 21 – Apr 19)

Not usually one to ask “How can I help,” you now have inner questions that beg for answers. As a strong leader, you could still acquiesce to a power greater than yourself. You may even enjoy such a pursuit, in that you might lose yourself in the greater good. You are a catalyst for others’ well being.



LIBRA (Sep 23 – Oct 22)

If you seek more validation for your creative efforts, you may try looking in new places that are unknown to you. Stepping out of the usual social circles could give you a perspective that proves inspiring. All that illuminates your spirit calls you to listen more effectively.



TAURUS (Apr 20 – May 21)

It’s possible you want to publish your good works or achieve some far-reaching goal from childhood. You may want to get your hands dirty and become closer to the organic purity you could find in gardening. Pursuits into group activities are also a source of pleasure now.



SCORPIO (Oct 23 – Nov 21)

If you find that your friends are not consistent with your mandate for depth and solidity, you may become less tolerant of such incompatible types. Lately, you want to spend time and energy with those who share your definition of friendship and closeness. Make your needs known and clear the slate.



GEMINI (May 22 – Jun 20)

Being a people pleaser is sometimes a hard line to tow. If you find you are over-extending yourself and your good graces, it may be time to stop. You might be drawn towards taking up a new sport or anything that will assist in shifting your awareness.



SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22 - Dec 21)

You shine when you help others become aware of how to achieve their goals and dreams. Teaching what you love to learn helps you evolve while doing what you know is purposeful to your destined path. Fulfillment may lie in sharing your wisdom.



CANCER (Jun 21 – Jul 22)

Many may learn the lesson of disillusionment or scandal, which seems very negative at the time. While it probably is, the fact remains that life comes with many highs and lows. Within chaos, we find order and harmony working in tandem. Your lungs will fill with possibility and all that is natural.



CAPRICORN (Dec 22 - Jan 19)

Just as a soul mate could be someone who challenges you and may even bring out your shadow side, they may taunt you to do things that you consider bold. You may not want to upset your steady and secure ways, but perhaps this is just what you need right now.



LEO (Jul 23 – Aug 22)

External events and the job market will perhaps change significantly. If you discover that you need a new career or are forced in some way to change direction in your work, doing what you love needs to be reflected in your choices. Keeping the fire of passion flourishing is also a job requirement.



AQUARIUS (Jan 20 – Feb 19)

You could have the desire to inspect and develop more of a reconnaissance style in many areas of your life. Anyone you consider a potential threat will dissolve in importance as you separate fact from fiction. You discover a new freedom as you take action to live in accordance with your own authority.



VIRGO (Aug 23 – Sep 22)

Ebb and flow suggest that one cannot always be on top. To allow yourself to perhaps seemingly lose at something is an avenue of ultimate triumph. As your ambitions run high, you could hone your earthy expression and talent for public speaking.



PISCES (Feb 20 – Mar 20)

You may have been given a lot of freedom in your life and experienced less discipline and structure. At times, when we are given direction and parameters, it is helpful to create balance and a sense of order. Remember, you are laying the groundwork now for the next series of improvements to unfold.

Adrien Dillon is a clairvoyant consultant and author with 33 years of experience in astrology, multi-media art and healing, adrien.dilon@gmail.com, members.shaw.ca/adrien.dilon

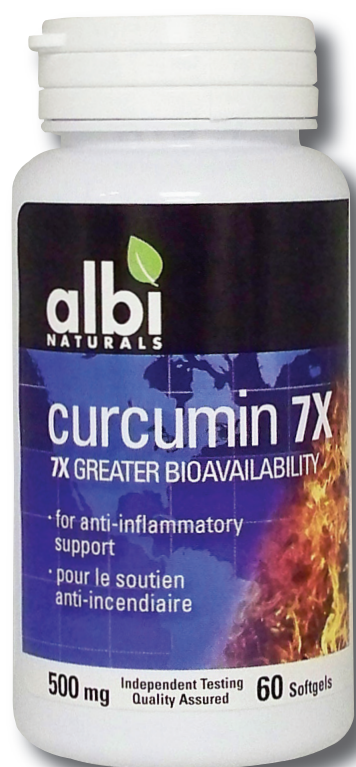


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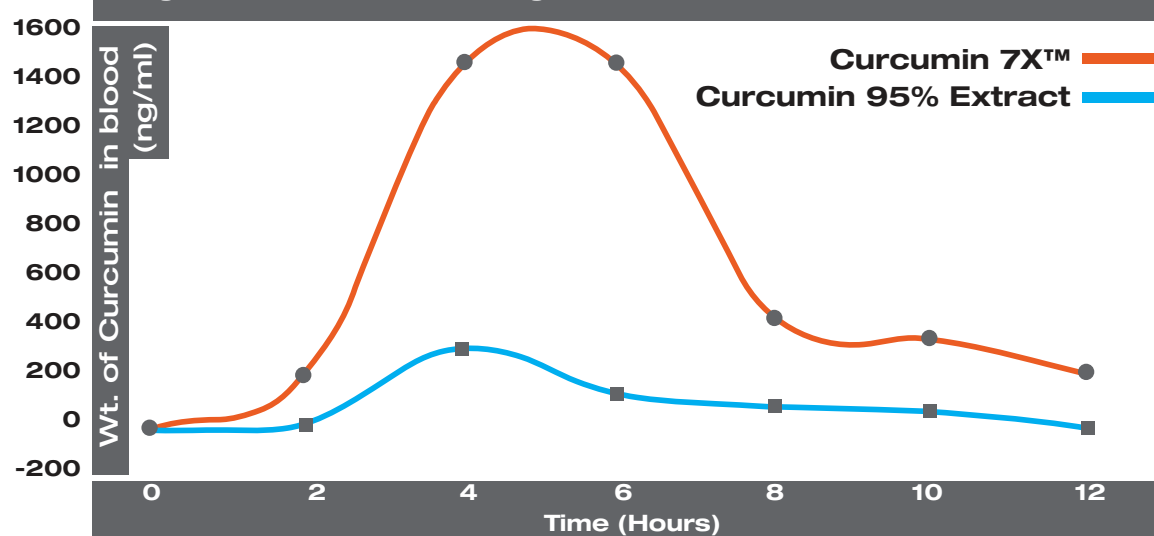


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